

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WELLINGTON, MONDAY, 21ST FEBRUARY, 1927.

Committee: MESSRS. J. W. COLLINS (Chairman), W. R. HAYWARD, W. B. MONTGOMERY, and M. J. REARDON.

A PRELIMINARY meeting of the Committee was held in Room 21, Parliamentary Building, on Monday, 21st February, 1927, at 2.30 p.m.

The following also attended:—

Mr. M. Myers, K.C. (with Mr. Young), representing the P.A.T.A.

Mr. M. J. Gresson (Christchurch), representing the Self-help Company, of Wellington, and the Star Stores Company, of Christchurch.

Mr. R. Kennedy, representing Macduffs Limited, of Wellington.

Mr. H. F. O'Leary, representing the members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. (Mr. O'Leary said that the members of the society considered they had sufficient interest in the result of the inquiry to be heard.) Mr. O'Leary also appeared for Mr. W. R. Boyd, grocer, of Day's Bay.

Mr. C. B. Walker, representing Earl Bros., grocers, of Johnsonville and Khandallah, and the New Zealand Railway Tradesmen's Association.

The Chairman said the members of the Committee had that morning met the Hon. Mr. McLeod, Minister of Industries and Commerce, who had stated that the procedure to be adopted in conducting the inquiry was left entirely to members of the Committee, and it was also left to the Committee to decide whether it should travel to other centres. The object of the present meeting was to decide the times of meeting. He did not know whether Mr. Myers would open the case, or whether he would expect those who sought the inquiry to open it. The Committee had decided to leave that matter to counsel themselves, but would prefer that Mr. Myers should open, for the sake of sequence.

Mr. Myers: I have no objection to that. For some reasons I should have preferred that those who are attacking us should open, but I quite understand that this Committee can frame its own order of procedure, and we are prepared to place ourselves in the hands of the Committee. I would like to say that my opening the proceedings will necessarily mean that I may have to call some evidence in rebuttal of any statements which may be made, because, naturally, I cannot anticipate all possible kinds of objection.

Mr. Gresson: That will suit me entirely. The difficulty otherwise would have been that we would have been asked to attack an association as to which we have no information.

Mr. Myers: Nevertheless, you have made the attack already.

Mr. Collins: With regard to the question as to whether it is necessary or expedient to visit other centres, this, I take it, is a matter that the Committee will decide itself. We are somewhat in a difficulty in that the advertisements calling for witnesses or persons capable of giving any information on the subject have met with little response—certainly insufficient to warrant the expense of going to other centres.

Mr. Myers: I doubt very much whether the expense of visiting other centres would be justified, but we might reserve our decision on that till later on.

Mr. Collins: Do you think, Mr. Myers, we are likely to obtain evidence outside Wellington different from that which we obtain in Wellington?

Mr. Myers: So far as the evidence against the P.A.T.A. is concerned, I should say, certainly not. So far as the evidence for the P.A.T.A. is concerned, as you know from your official experience, there are a great many manufacturers outside Wellington, and it may be necessary for us to have representative manufacturers here from other centres, but I cannot definitely say at this stage.

Mr. Gresson: From our point of view I do not think there will be any reason to go to the other centres. Once you have heard the type of evidence we will lead in Wellington, it will be the same in Canterbury and Dunedin. I think it would be merely duplicating the evidence if we went from one centre to another.

Mr. Collins: We naturally regard ourselves as a Committee of investigation for the whole of New Zealand, and we do not wish it to be thought that in not visiting the other centres we desire to choke off any one who might wish to be heard.

Mr. Gresson: I have brought one of my clients to Wellington from Christchurch to give evidence.

Mr. Collins: With regard to the presence of the Press, the Committee has concluded that they will leave it to you to decide whether they are to be present or not, or as to whether confidential evidence should be reported or not. If any witness objected to his evidence being reported we could honour his wishes, but we decided that you should be asked whether you agreed to the Press being represented.