

ceded a number of men who are now earning decent livelihoods must necessarily quit their present employment, and the only answer to the question as to what was to become of such men was a suggestion of one of the union witnesses that they should go "bush-whacking," a suggestion which appears to me to involve not only a very imperfect knowledge on the part of the witness as to what is involved in "bush-whacking," but a very imperfect conception of the rights of his fellow-workmen. The evidence shows that there is no lack of employment for skilled and steady workmen, so that it is impossible to suggest that these workmen who are not fully skilled, probably in most cases from lack of sufficient experience, are keeping skilled workmen out of employment by working for unduly low wages. It was not contested on the part of the union that if the concessions demanded by the union were made prices must be advanced. The evidence, however, satisfies me that it is impossible that there can be any advance in prices which would recoup the additional cost to the employers of conceding the demands of the union, or any substantial part of such cost. The employers are working in competition not only with each other, but with other similar establishments in other centres in the colony, and not only with these, but also with importations.

Dealing first with the engineering firms, I find, according to the wages-list produced by Messrs. Anderson, showing the wages at present paid and what would have to be paid under the scheme of the union (including loss occasioned by the proposed limitation of apprentices), that the annual cost to this one firm alone would amount, for the trades actually before the Court, to £1,560 17s. 6d., and for like allowances to moulders and boilermakers, which must inevitably follow, to £3,015 6s. 2d., making a total of £4,576 3s. 8d. No attempt was made to discredit these figures, or other similar figures put forward by the employers, and I see no reason to doubt that they are substantially correct. Nor was any attempt made to prove, either by cross-examination of the employers or otherwise, that these burdens could be borne by the employers out of their profits. On the other hand, each of the employers who gave evidence deposed that he could not carry on business under these conditions. The claims of the union would bear even more hardly upon the agricultural-implement manufacturers. The evidence showed, in my opinion, conclusively that these manufacturers have to cope with very keen competition from foreign importations, and that this competition is becoming more severe year by year. I am satisfied that the result of granting union demands would, so far as these manufacturers are concerned, result in the bulk of the goods now manufactured by them being imported from beyond the colony, and consequently in the throwing out of employment a large number of men who are now employed in the agricultural-machinery shops.

The rest of the peculiar conditions of the trade is such that it appears to me that it is not possible at the present time to fix any minimum rate of wage, nor is there any real necessity to do so. It is not disputed that the rates of wages which may be commanded by skilled and steady workmen have for many years been practically the same, nor is it alleged that there has been any attempt to reduce them. These rates, however, cannot be fixed as the minimum rates, as the result would be to make the maximum rate the minimum rate, and to throw out of employment a large body of steady and deserving men who are not sufficiently skilled to command the highest wage. Further, the result would be to close the agricultural-machinery shops, in which the highest degree of skill is not required, and which could not be carried on at a profit if workmen of the highest skill and at the highest wages only were engaged therein. There is no reason whatever to doubt that the best skilled workmen, if steady, will continue to be able to command the same rate of wages as heretofore. Nothing has been shown which, in my opinion, could justify the Court in fixing a rate of wage which would necessarily throw out of employment a large number of workmen of lesser degrees of skill, and which would put an end to an already struggling industry.

I have already intimated that, in my opinion, the concession of the demands of the union would result in the speedy extinction of the agricultural-implement manufacturing trade. To a lesser extent this would also be the result with the general engineering shops. In these, however, a certain number of men not of the first skill might be replaced by men of greater skill; but these would have to be procured outside the district, and probably outside the colony, for such men are not now available for employment in the district. To concede the demands of the union would therefore have the effect of throwing out of employment deserving workmen, many of whom are probably natives of the colony, for the benefit of persons to be imported from elsewhere. It appears to me that it would be very wrong to take any course which would have this effect.

The next demand is for payment for overtime. As to this, the practice in engineering shops has differed from that in agricultural-implement shops. In engineering shops overtime appears for the most part to have been paid, while the contrary appears to have been the case in the agricultural-machinery shops, except Messrs. P. and D. Duncan's, in which also general engineering appears to be undertaken. The reason for the difference in practice appears to be that overtime in general engineering shops appears generally to be worked in connection with repairs or other work, for which there is no fixed price, so that the extra payment for overtime can be taken into consideration in the charge to the customer; whereas in agricultural-machinery shops such overtime as is worked is ordinarily upon machines which are sold at a catalogue price, which cannot be advanced upon, and which is already fixed so as to leave only a small margin of profit. Moreover, the work in agricultural-machinery shops appears to be more constant in its character than that in general engineering shops. I see no reason for departing from this practice, the reasons for which appear to be sufficient. It appears that overtime is occasionally worked in repairing the machines of the employer used in the business in which the workman is employed. It was conceded, as I understand, that, except upon Sundays and certain other special days, it would be reasonable that this should be worked at ordinary rates, the repair to the machinery being necessary in the interests of both parties. With the above exception, it seems to be reasonable that overtime should be paid for, and the rules as to this and as to night-shifts provide for payment at the rates asked by the union. Suitable provision has also been made for payment of out-work allowances, and for dirt-money in marine repair-work.

There remain the questions as to the number of apprentices to be employed in the trades affected, and the claim of the union to a preference of employment. The union claim that the number of apprentices in each department of the trade shall not exceed one to every four journeymen or fraction of the first four, and that all apprentices shall serve a term of five years before reaching the age of twenty-one years. The main grounds urged in support of this claim are—first, that the trade will become overmanned unless the number of apprentices is so limited; and, second, that the apprentices are not so well taught if their numbers exceed these suggested. Up to the present time the number of apprentices has not been limited, but the trade has not become overmanned, nor is there any suggestion that it is overmanned. The reason is that engineers are required in many other walks in life besides engineering shops, such as marine engineers, refrigerating engineers, both at sea and ashore, &c. Engineers are also required in all large factories where machinery is used. The engineering shops are necessarily the training-grounds for all these engineers, and the result has been that all the lads who have served their apprenticeship in Christchurch and have learned their trade have had no difficulty in finding employment. The second ground equally fails. It has been proved beyond a doubt that engineers trained in Christchurch shops have been able to hold their own with engineers trained in Great Britain and elsewhere, and that many of them have done remarkably well. This was not, indeed, seriously contested by the union. It would require very special grounds, in my opinion, to justify an award which would have the effect of closing the door to an employment which has so many outlets, and which is justly popular with the youth of the colony. No such ground has been shown, and the claim therefore fails. There is, indeed, a special ground (to which, however, it is really unnecessary to advert) why such a claim should be more closely scrutinised in Christchurch than elsewhere in the colony. There is, it seems, in Christchurch a school of engineering, attended by some ninety students, all of whom require to have a practical knowledge of their trade, which they can only acquire in the engineering shops in Christchurch. It is not contested that this school does good work, and that it is a highly desirable institution, yet the result of conceding the union demand in the matter would be to debar many of the students from acquiring the practical knowledge which is essential to them.

The claim of the union to a preference of employment, in my opinion, necessarily fails when it is ascertained that the union is not really representative of the greater number of the workmen employed in the trade, and the claims of the union have not resulted in any practical benefit to the bulk of the workmen. I desire to guard myself from seeming to lay down any rules as to when it may be proper to give such a privilege to the members of a union, because I think that each case must stand upon its own merits, and the claim must, in every case, be carefully