

CONTROL OF TAILORING TRADE: SALE OF GARMENTS TO MEASURE.

These regulations, which were set out in full as an appendix to the Department's Report for 1925, came into force in February of last year.

The Department of Labour has co-operated with this Department in carrying out the provisions of the regulations. During the past year it was found necessary to take legal action in three instances, the cases being handled by the Labour Department. In each case the Magistrate upheld the Department's view and penalties were imposed. The offences were of a somewhat similar nature, being based upon the selling of clothing as "hand-made" or "hand-tailored" when in fact the minimum amount of hand-work had not been done.

The general opinion of those concerned is that the regulations and the publicity given to them have had the effect of preventing the misuse of the words "hand-made" or "tailor-made," thus protecting both the order-tailoring trade and the consuming public.

INVESTIGATIONS.

The Department undertakes as part of its regular functions the making of investigations into various trades and industries for the purpose of advising Government regarding tariff and other questions relating to such industries. Inquiries relative to price-levels have not been made to the same extent as in past years, competition, both local and from overseas, being so keen in many trades as to preclude the possibility of any general charging of excessive prices. In a number of trades, however, combinations of sellers have been formed (often for mutual protection and the proper development of business) which are liable to bring about an elimination of that competition which is essential to the protection of buyers.

The Department endeavours at all times to keep touch with the changing conditions in various trades and industries, and both for reasons of restrictive control and for the assistance of industry or commerce exercises the statutory right of full and extensive inquiry where circumstances necessitate. The nature, scope, and results of these investigations are often of a confidential nature, and no reports are published.

CHATTELS TRANSFER ACT, 1924.

Section 57 of this Act makes certain special provisions in respect of classes of chattels recognized as being the subject of customary hire-purchase agreements. The main purpose of the section is to provide that in all such cases the hire-purchase agreement is valid and effectual for all purposes without registration, and that the interest of bailors of chattels, the subject of such customary hire-purchase agreements, shall be protected against the claims of creditors of a bankrupt bailee.

These provisions apply only to such chattels as are set out in the Seventh Schedule to the Act, but it is also provided that the scope of the section may be extended by the addition by Order in Council of other classes of chattels. Such Orders in Council may be made if the Governor-General is satisfied of the existence of a practice of dealing in the chattels in question by the system of hire-purchase.

A number of applications to add to the schedule have been received, and the Department has been called upon to make inquiry into the commercial practices in such matters and to make reports and recommendations to Government on such applications. Since the passing of the Act, Orders in Council have been made bringing under the provisions of section 57 the following classes of chattels: Electric equipment, apparatus and appliances in connection with the use of electric energy; tractors; computing-scales, weighing-machines, bread- and bacon-slicing machines, and cheese-cutting machines; gas-stoves, gas-geysers, gas washing-coppers.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY.

During the past year the Government arranged for the hearing by Sir John Hosking of a claim on petition by the Woolston Tanneries (Limited) for State compensation in respect of trading losses arising out of operations carried on allegedly under such circumstances as to justify or warrant a payment by the State.

The first portion of the claim was based upon the suggestion that as a result of War Regulations portion of the business of the company—the fellmongery department—could not be carried on, and that expense and loss of profit resulted from an alleged unreasonable restriction. This claim was, during the hearing before the Commissioner, abandoned.

The second section of the petition was heard over a period of several days. It was alleged by the petitioners that, with the support and at the request of the Board of Trade, the company made provision for the production of large quantities of leather in 1920, in order that a national shortage might be avoided, and that the company sold or offered to sell such leather at prices which would prevent serious increases in prices of leather goods. Voluminous evidence was tendered both for the petitioners and for the Government. Evidence as to the Department's connection with the matter was given by the Secretary, who, with other officers, had appeared at previous hearings of the claim before parliamentary Committees. The Commissioner gave his decision on all points against the company, and indicated clearly that the loss made by the firm could not in any sense be regarded as resulting from any pressure or request from the Department, and the claim, which mentioned sums of many thousands of pounds, was accordingly rejected.