

SUNSHINE HARVESTER CASE.

THE COST OF LIVING.

Melbourne, October 22.

The hearing of the application by Hugh V. McKay, of the Sunshine Harvester Company, for a certificate exempting him from the payment of duty under the Excise Act of 1906, was continued before the Arbitration Court to-day.

Mr. Schutt, counsel for McKay, remarked that it had been stated that a witness who gave evidence on Friday last had since been dismissed from his employment. The suggestion was that the employe had been dismissed in consequence of having given evidence for the employes. McKay had made enquiries, and a letter had been received from the witness' late employers, who stated in the most direct manner that the giving of evidence in the case by the witness had nothing whatever to do with his dismissal.

Mr. Justice Higgins said he paid no attention to statements of the kind referred to.

Mr. Arthur, counsel for the unions, furnished copies of volumes containing the records of determinations by the New Zealand wages boards. He pointed out that these showed that awards had been made as follows:—Auckland—Iron and brass moulders, not less than $1/1\frac{1}{2}$ per hour; competent journeymen plate workers, $1/3$. Wellington—Moulders, $1/1\frac{1}{2}$. Otago—Moulders, $1/3$, with some distinctions in favor of journeymen, who deemed themselves not capable of earning the minimum wage. Auckland—Moulders, including agricultural implement makers, $1/3$; tinsmiths, $1/2$; tin-plate sheet metal operatives, $1/1\frac{1}{2}$.

David Skidmore, iron moulder, employed by the Austral Otis Engineering Company and treasurer of the Ironmoulders' Union, stated that the minimum wage in his trade for moulders had been fixed at 10/ per day, pipe moulders, however, ranging from 8/6 to 10/6. There were over 200 in the Melbourne branch of the union. Shops paying the minimum wage were the Austral Otis, J. & T. Muir, Robinson Bros., Nixon's, Australian Steel Company, McKenzie's, Roberts', and others. He knew of no moulder in the Austral Otis Works getting less than the fixed minimum wage. The wages board had reduced the wages from 10/ to 8/ per day, the employes agreeing, because the employers said that the then tariff was too low, being only 12½ per cent. The agricultural implement makers argued that they could not compete with imported machines if they paid more than 8/. Some 20 years ago the wage was 10/. He himself and some others were paid 11/. At Langland's foundry he received 10/8, but the rate dropped gradually to 9/ and 8/. This was largely due to the fact that apprentices were not properly taught their trade, and journeymen were being induced to accept less than the minimum wage because of their incompetence.

Mr. Justice Higgins—Do you mean that there are imperfectly-trained youths on account of whom journeymen allow their rates to be cut?

The Witness—Yes, in order to save their places. The employers take on slightly inferior men, because they will work for something less, and in consequence really competent men have to walk about the streets idle for weeks and months.

Continuing, the witness said when depression came after the boom the moulders consented to a reduction to 9/. After 18 months or two years, they gradually got the old wage restored. They tried to get the agricultural implement men to join in with the union, so that they, too, should have 10/. In the busy seasons union men were taken into the implement works at 10/ and over. Men for agricultural implement work had been advertised for at 10/6. He had a wife and four children, and at the time of the starch enquiry he was surprised at the evidence given as to the cost of living. He asked his wife why

the money he gave her seemed to go so quickly, and his wife had now made out a list of her weekly household expenses, as follows:—Groceries, 12/; meat, 7/6; bread, 3/6; milk, 3/; fruit and vegetables, 8/; newspaper, 6d.; fuel, 1 3/; coke, 1/; gas, 2/8; lodge, 1/3. Total, £2 0/6. In addition, had to be reckoned rent, clothing, school-books, fares, and other requisites. The moulders considered that agricultural implement work had been stolen from them. In a union shop the union "shop steward" had a right to ask other men what their wages were, and if he doubted them he could ask to see the money they received, but he could not force a reply. No union man would be allowed by the union to work for less than 10/ per day unless he received the permission of the union. An old member might on consideration be allowed to accept 9/ per day. The union had to pay for incompetent hands. They had had a rule that any member proposing an incompetent man for membership should be fined. Incompetent men suffered for their own fault or misfortune, but if employed they brought wages down 1/ or 2/, and made all suffer. The majority of ironmoulders in Melbourne were members of the union. After the strike for 11/ a day 10/8 was awarded, and at the conference of 1891 the wage was further reduced to 10/4. The recent Sydney conference fixed the rate at 10/ for eight hours.

Joseph Hannon, secretary of the Ironfounders' Union, said from his experiences that men earning 7/ per day could not get a decent house of four rooms at less rent than 10/ or 11/ per week. Rents had increased during the last few years by from 20 to 25 per cent. His own pay was 63/ per week, and he handed in a list of his household expenses for absolute necessities, which totalled £2 4/5. He was a married man with two children.

A lady from a southern suburb, whose husband is an engine-driver in a factory, said she was given £3 per week, and that her weekly housekeeping expenses were as follows:—Rent, 12/6; lodge, 1/6; bread, 5/9; milk, 2/9; groceries, 18/; vegetables, 3/; newspapers, 9d.; meat, 10/; firewood, 2/4; gas, 1/; fruit, 1/; total, £2 18/7. She had seven children, two of whom earned between them 10/ per week, which sum nearly kept the family in clothing. Out of her house money she paid £1 11/11 half-yearly for her husband's insurance for £100 at death or at the age of 55 years. The cost of bread, butter, sugar, meat, rent, and other things had gone up in recent times. A neighboring family lived on 38/ in a tumble-down place of three rooms that was not fit to live in. The man was steady, but the family had to beg and borrow from the neighbors, as they could not live a decent respectable life on 38/.

The court adjourned.