

I may say that when these people came in, I gave the most positive instructions that they should not, while under the charge of government officers, engage in any work that would bring them into competition with other men. I am sorry to say that owing to the difficulty of handling so many people at one time, my instructions were not in all cases literally carried out. As soon as I found this to be the case, I telegraphed positive instructions, and I have reason to believe that my instructions were carried out from that time forward.

The question of work upon railways is a difficult one to deal with, and I must admit that it has not occurred to me that labouring men in the cities would be affected by the immigrants doing work upon the railways.

This has been one of the experiences in the North-west especially in connection with competition of foreign labour on railways. And although the hon. gentleman from Selkirk (Mr. McCreary) told us fairly and eloquently of the bright side of the immigration question, there is a seamy side that he could have referred to and his portrayal of which would have been of very great value to this House. Everybody knows that there must have been evil effects attendant on the immigration to the North-west during the last few years. Every one knows that there must have been a great deal of trouble and of wrong-doing perpetrated on some people, but I am glad to say that a large part of the evil possible has been averted by a thoroughly competent and wide-awake immigration commissioner. It is unfortunate, but it is true that in a large number of cases all manner of means are resorted to in one way or another, to get more value out of these people than the employers wish to give an equivalent for. That is done by various methods and in some cases by the very direct method of absolutely refusing to pay them at all. I wish to say that the immigration commissioner has in some cases, I believe, done that which he had no lawful right to do, and the result of his action was the very laudable one that some employers were obliged to act square and to pay these foreigners what they owed them. Whether they could speak English or not they got fair treatment. In this connection I would say that the Immigration Department might very well add to its other functions in the North-west and establish an employment bureau over which there would be a legal officer whose duty it would be to take hold of these frauds that are daily perpetrated on immigrants who are brought to Canada by this government, to see that they are protected, that the people who employ them pay them their proper wage, and that they should measure their work with proper measures which is often not done now. If this were done a great many of the evils that are now complained of would be abolished, and justice and right would be done. Replying to this letter of the Minister of the Interior, the Trades and Labour Council of Winnipeg stated their general position in

regard to immigration, and it is for the purpose of submitting this letter to the House that I refer to the question because it will give a fair idea of the attitude taken by labour on this question:

To the Hon. Clifford Sifton,
Minister of the Interior.

Dear Sir,—We have very carefully considered your letter of the 10th inst. respecting the immigration policy of this country and the effort which you say the government has made to prevent unjust competition against the industrious classes.

You say that 'in your judgment there is no class of population which is more interested in filling up the country with an agricultural population than the labouring men of the cities and towns.'

By what process of reasoning you have arrived at that conclusion you state not; therefore, we trust you will pardon us if we call your attention to some considerations respecting this matter.

Labourers buy goods and sell labour. The welfare of the labouring classes will depend, therefore, on these two conditions, the price of goods and the wages of labour. We, therefore, ask your attention to these two factors.

First, as to the price of goods, how are they affected by the present system of indirect customs duties? Are they made cheap or made dear? Does the government send out agents to the cheapest markets in the world and offer bonuses at so much a pound, or so much a yard, to enable labourers to buy their goods at the lowest possible rate?

You know thoroughly well that not in a single instance has the slightest effort been made to enable workmen to buy cheap. It is altogether in the opposite direction. In the whole proceedings of parliament, from the day of its inception, never had any member made the first proposal or uttered the first hint that taxes should be directed to enable the labouring classes to get their goods at the cheapest possible price. Labourers are never aided to buy cheap.

And, Sir, when labouring men discuss this question of immigration, in my opinion they do right to consider it in connection with the question of the customs duty or the tariff. They can argue and argue consistently that the tariff has the effect of enhancing the price of everything they buy, and therefore of reducing the purchasing power of their earnings. The tariff makes the market high against them in what they have to buy, and the immigration policy, so far as it encourages and bonuses the immigration of labourers, brings them competition. So that their wages are reduced in the one instance by the customs tariff, and in the other their labour, which is the only thing they have to sell, is made cheap.

We now ask your attention to the act of selling. Labourers do not sell goods, they sell labour. Can any of your colleagues point out a single particular in which you enable us to sell dear? Not merely do you subject the labouring classes to the widest possible competition, but you maintain at enormous expense an immigration system whereby you intensify our competition. You crowd the labour market. Even at times when we are striking to secure

Mr. PUTTEE.