

ment of freight. They supply steamers when and where we require them, and we give them a certain amount of carrying work. This is expressly stipulated in an agreement simply by letter. We are free to charter other steamers and to sell coal f.o.b., Westport, to whomsoever we like, and they are equally free to buy from whomsoever they like. We sell to other steamers. We give carriage to any and every steamer that comes there. To Wanganui there is the Anchor Company; the Wellington Steam Packet Company; the "Gertie;" the "Himitangi," Messrs. Levin and Company's steamer. These go to Pictou, New Plymouth, Foxton, Patea, and other places. In fact, we hold ourselves open to do business with anybody we can do it with on the best terms.

23. So that if any one makes a statement that an arrangement exists between the Westport Coal Company and the Union Company, whereby the interests of other shipowners are prejudiced, you would say that statement is not correct?—Yes.

24. About the staiths at Westport?—The Westport Harbour Board, as you are aware, are now building extensive wharves, from which the loading will be conducted on a different plan. The wharves will be provided with cranes, and the coal will be lifted bodily in the trucks into the hold of the vessel. Do you consider that system preferable?—Very much.

25. Can you tell us if there is a great saving in time by loading at the staiths?—I have no experience of that. I do not know what time they take at Greymouth, where they load by cranes. At Westport it is to be a better arrangement, as instead of the steamer having to move to the cranes the cranes will move to the steamer.

26. In the light of your experience, Mr. Joachim, it is a reasonable inference that it would be a wise policy to abandon the staiths altogether?—Decidedly so.

27. I have been of that opinion myself for a long time.—At present screened coal suffers considerably. We must have more rolling-stock, however.

28. Will there be a disadvantage in abandoning the staiths on account of the time they save?—The whole of the Newcastle trade is loaded by cranes.

29. Has the price of coal gone down of late years?—Our price, f.o.b. Westport, during the last four years has been reduced 20 per cent. If the Committee would take the price at the pit's mouth they would get a better comparison than by taking it at the different ports. In the first place: in regard to screened coal, when the whole of the output has been picked over, we only get about 25 per cent. that the people will buy as household coal. The remainder has to be sold for other purposes.

30. *Mr. Hogg.* And sold below cost price; that is, the 75 per cent.?—Yes, 75 per cent. has to be sold for other purposes than household purposes, and for that we have to take a much lower price.

31. Is unscreened adapted equally well for gas purposes?—Yes, the gas people take either the unscreened or small. Some prefer the small, and some the unscreened.

32. They are almost equal to each other for gas purposes, are they not?—Of course, we get higher prices for the screened than we do for the small.

33. What is the value of the coal you dispose of in Wellington for gas?—I really could not tell, but I suppose about 13s. 6d. c.i.f.; that is, small coal.

34. You say about 10 per cent. is lost every time the coal is screened?—It goes to dust, and then we have to sell it at a much lower price.

35. Is that dust utilised?—Yes, we sell it at a lower price for some purposes. We have to get it off.

36. Then, if in four years the price has been reduced by 20 per cent., has that, do you think, led to an increased consumption?—Yes: a very considerably increased consumption. I will give you our output. Last year it was 280,000 tons, and the year before it was 244,000 tons; in 1896 it was 211,000 tons; in 1895, 183,000 tons, and this year we expect to put out 320,000 tons. A steady increase in quantity, and a steady decline in price.

37. That means that in half a dozen years you will have doubled the output?—Of course, that will depend upon the prosperity of New Zealand, and also whether we can do an export trade. That, again, depends very much on the state of the harbour.

38. Then, I presume that the reduction is more than compensated for by the increased consumption?—I do not think it is. We are not making so much profit per ton as we were five or six years ago.

39. You were making more profit when you had the better price and the reduced output?—The principle we go on is that the lower we can get our price the larger our business will be, and that is a safe principle to go on.

40. *The Chairman.* Do you make any coke?—No.

41. Do you think the dust could be advantageously used for coke?—So long as we can sell it to the steamers I do not think it would. You are aware that our rate to the men is not the same as in Newcastle, where they pay at per ton for screened coal, but it is over. The whole output is weighed, and we pay at per ton, large and small all over. I can tell you the price realised by our coal, free on board at Westport and at the pit's mouth, in comparison with other countries. For instance, the selling price of the whole of our output, from f.o.b. at Westport, is 10s. 5·82d. If you deduct the royalty, 6d., and the railway-haulage, 2s. 4d., we get a net price at the pit's mouth of 7s. 7·82d. for the whole of our output. Glamorganshire coal is sold at the pit's mouth at 6s. 8·77d. per ton, or 1s. per ton below ours, that is in South Wales. And in New South Wales I think the average is about 6s. Then, the railway-haulage is very different in New South Wales from what it is here. The Newcastle rate for twelve miles is 1s.; our rate is 2s. 3d. for the same distance. Then, the Newcastle owners find their own trucks, and I am told that 2d. is an ample allowance for that; so their rate comes to 1s. 2d., against our 2s. 3d. And the Committee know that the wages are very different here from what they are in Newcastle. The Newcastle miner averages 8s. a day and our men average 13s. 6d., and nearly all the day-men are higher in proportion.