

33. *The Chairman.*] Are you of opinion that the coal, whether used for coal or steaming purposes, is deteriorated in value by loading by the staiths—that is, broken up?—Theoretically, a chemist would tell you, if you can burn coal in powder it is the most perfect way; but then there are practical objections to that. If these rich coals are broken up all the gas gets away. If you put the coal outside it will weather. Some of the gas companies have their trucks running right alongside, and they will not have it broken at all. I should say the staiths would deteriorate the coal for either steam or household purposes.

34. The Westport Harbour Board are now providing a better method of loading?—Yes. The big point in screening is the waste of good material.

35. In addition to the cost of screening, you add to the cost of the coal by the loss of coal through the screening?—Yes; the miner in New Zealand gets paid for everything taken out; the miner in Newcastle does not.

36. It has been contended that, in consequence of the machines used in the mines the coal is considerably broken up, more so than by the old method of taking it out by picks?—The coal-cutters are not supposed to make so much waste. The experience in England is that the coal-cutters make very much less waste than the old style, and at a much cheaper rate. In the Old Country they do for 8d. what was formerly charged 1s. for.

37. Do you dispose of coal at the small ports along the coast—that is, at Patea, Wanganui, Foxton, &c.?—Yes; at Foxton, Patea, Nelson, and Blenheim.

38. What is the freight to Foxton?—11s. from Westport. From Wellington to Wanganui I think it is 7s. 6d.

39. Does the Union Company do the carrying?—No; I send with Cock and Co. to Foxton, the Anchor line and by the other little boats to Blenheim, and by the small boats that trade to Wanganui.

40. The object of the Committee is to recommend, if possible, some method whereby the coal will be brought to the consumer at a much cheaper rate. That is the object we have in calling you here. Briefly, can you suggest any better way of making a substantial reduction than by dispensing with the screening and abolishing the method of loading by the staiths at Westport?—If you abolished the screening you would eliminate the question of loading by the staiths, because, as a matter of fact, the small coal would cushion the other.

41. You recommend the loading by cranes and the abolition of screening?—As a matter of fact, people put on the price of coal themselves by insisting on what they get. I made the remark that the Government were the biggest sinners. Well, I tried Mr. Seddon to see if they would take it unscreened, but they would not do it. In the Government Buildings they want the biggest lumps, and I have had to set my men to hand-pick the big lumps of Newcastle coal, because Westport was not big enough to suit them. They smash it up in the boxes, and then they tell you that there is slack left. For peace sake we have carted it away.

42. Is it not the case that if coal is in too large lumps it has to be broken up for household purposes?—They want the big lumps, and then they smash it up; they then get small coal left, and they want it taken away.

43. It has been stated to me by different people that it is the custom for coal-dealers to mix the Westport coal and the Newcastle, and dispose of it as Westport coal?—I do not know; you cannot say. We do it as it is ordered. Most people take it perhaps half-and-half, wanting to slow the other down. One of the mines I was agent for was a shade different in colour to the other—in fact, all Newcastle is different to the other. Everybody takes half-and-half, or something like that.

44. You do not mix the coal unless it is expressly ordered?—No; so far as my knowledge goes, if you order a ton of Coalbrookdale or Cardiff you get it. That is what every one is supposed to do, but I can only speak for my own people.

45. *Mr. Hogg.*] What is the coal chiefly consumed in Wellington: is it mostly Newcastle?—A large proportion of Westport. I do not suppose the increase of Newcastle for this last four or five years is more than 2000 or 3000 tons. And the other is almost a third more. People just take the Newcastle a little to mix, to steady the other down.

46. Then, there is a considerably larger quantity of New Zealand consumed here than Newcastle?—Oh, yes.

47. You supply a good deal to the Government Buildings?—Yes; I supply New Zealand coal to the Government Buildings, Newcastle to the Manawatu Railway Company, and I send it up the country.

48. Do the Government use New Zealand and Newcastle?—No; all New Zealand. They stipulate that, but they take tenders for the other.

49. You have got to allow a considerable amount for losses by bad debts?—Well, the margin I have put here is 2s. 5d. That is to cover yard-rent, wear-and-tear, bad debts, &c.

50. Do you make a difference between coal booked and cash?—2s. in the ton; though if a man sends in a cheque I send him the 2s.—that is, if the money is paid within the month.

51. You say that there is very little accommodation for storage?—Yes.

52. They have not got into the way of building coal-cellars?—There is not the room here. The town is too jammed up, and the sections are getting smaller. They have a bit of a box that will not hold more, perhaps, than 3 cwt. or 4 cwt.

53. They have not the big bunkers, the same as they have in the Old Country?—No. I know a very few people here to whom you can take a cart-load and take it into their yard. There are only three people in my mind where your carts can drive in and put out a load of coal.

54. How much is it a cart-load?—It is all by weight. From the wharf they carry 2 tons in each dray. They are paid by the ton for carting. There are a great number of smaller dealers who cart their own coal. I put the wharf drays on, and use my own drays to cart it out to the customers. In sending it out you cannot send more than half a ton sometimes, especially in sending it up the Karori Hill, and it then takes half a day to deliver it.