

182. But you would not be the fittest?—We might or might not be. Experience shows that in every instance where a man has been working by himself, and has not been hampered by conditions of labour, and could work as many hours as he chose, such a man can compete with all your machinery.

183. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Supposing baker A got an advantage of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the loaf over baker B through the lessening of expense by means of new machinery, and baker A gave the public the advantage of that saving of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the loaf, would baker B call it fair competition?—It is a question, of course, that would have to be worked out to see whether it was fair competition. Sometimes such a thing as this will happen while a man is trying to build up his trade. Supposing a man tried to start on the lines you indicate, he has to make his trade. He might say, "I can sell $\frac{1}{2}$ d. or 1d. under you," and he may have a few hundreds of pounds to lose. He might say that it paid him all right, but in such a case who is going to decide whether it pays him or not? Some years ago the trade was very bad in Dunedin, before the association started. Bread was actually sold in Dunedin at $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. the 4 lb. loaf, and everybody concerned was losing money, and the larger firms almost decided to give up business. There is a resolution in one of our minute-books showing that we decided to petition the Government to provide means whereby prices should be regulated. We did not draft that petition, because the Premier came along, and we decided to wait upon him, which we did. Our idea was to have a Board provided that would regulate the price of bread, so that both we bakers and the public should be protected. We considered it only fair and just that, owing to the way in which we were hampered with labour laws and all sorts of conditions in carrying out our business, we should have a little protection, and that the public should be protected at the same time. Mr. Seddon was very cordial and sympathetic with us. He said he knew our difficulties, and had experienced the same sort of trouble himself—that was, by the storekeeper trying to ruin the baker. He said there was another feature to be considered, and that in another part of the colony he thought they were charging too much. He said he had been watching the bread riots in Italy very closely, and the legislation which had been passed in other countries dealing with these matters. He promised to lay the matter before his colleagues. There were also several members of the Employers' Union present with us when we waited upon Mr. Seddon. Some time afterwards we received intimation that the Cabinet had considered the matter, but could not see their way to introduce legislation to overcome the difficulty. Consequently, as the Government declined to help us in any shape or form, we came to the conclusion that God helps those who help themselves, and we endeavoured to put the trade on a better footing by starting the Master Bakers' Union on the present lines.

184. *The Chairman.*] Was it Mr. Seddon who suggested on the top of that that the millers and the bakers could settle the price of bread themselves?—That was the inference we drew from his reply, that the millers and bakers should settle the question among themselves.

185. You told us that at one time the price of bread was $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. the 4 lb. loaf?—Yes.

186. Why is bread now so much higher than it was some time ago, when it was selling apparently at a remunerative price both to the miller and the baker?—We are making a fair living out of it now, whereas previously we were not—we were losing money.

187. It has been given in evidence that out of a ton of wheat something more than £2 10s. was made last year than this year—that is, including the by-products: out of that £2 10s. is the miller or the baker getting an undue proportion?—I should say the miller, but I cannot speak on that question. I would like to explain that our price for the last two years has compared very favourably with the price that has been obtained throughout the Commonwealth in the various States, and that sometimes we have been rather under their prices.

188. When bread was $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. recently in Dunedin, and wheat was about 5s. a bushel, do you not consider that $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. was too high a price for the public to pay?—I do not think so.

189. And you think the bakers are not getting the most out of it?—When flour was at a lower price we were working exactly on the same basis.

190. What is the difference in money-value between 200 lb. sacks and 50 lb. bags? Under normal conditions what would you charge for fifties?—They reckon for first-class flour 15s. a ton difference on account of the cost of the small bags. But a man may put inferior flour into the fifties.

191. At the time you could not get the brands you wanted did you want the flour for speculative prices, or was it under normal conditions?—It was a speculation.

192. Do you consider that Adelaide wheat is equal in quality to New Zealand wheat?—I never had any experience of Adelaide wheat. They always tell us that Adelaide flour gives us a greater percentage of bread than New Zealand flour.

193. *Mr. Taylor.*] When did Steven and Co. withdraw from the association?—At the end of February, I think.

194. You say they committed a breach of your rule?—Yes.

195. In selling to a man who was undercutting?—Yes.

196. Do you know if they sold to him below the association prices?—I could not say that; in fact, I never asked the question.

197. In regard to the price charged for bread by the Bakers' Union, you did not allow the Millers' Association to interfere with the price of bread?—Not in any shape or form.

198. Do you know that there has been an actual combination between the millers and bakers in Canterbury to regulate the price of bread?—No.

199. Read Rule 11 of the Canterbury Master Bakers' Union [rules handed to witness]. That provides for a price committee with a miller as chairman?—Yes; but we fix the price of bread in Dunedin ourselves.

200. Your policy is that if a miller sells to any baker who charges a lower price to the public than the Bakers' Union fixes you will not buy flour from that miller?—That is so, according to our rules.