

of New Zealand (Limited), we hereby agree not to sell in bond or otherwise for export out of New Zealand any of the brands of cigarettes and tobaccos which we buy from you for home consumption in this colony"?—I have not heard of that. That means that they cannot send to Australia or outside the colony any goods.

35. You are not familiar with any papers that have been sent out?—No, except in a general way of what has been made public property.

36. *Mr. Hardy.*] How much profit do you say the wholesale people make out of plug tobacco?—I said, on my firm's brands I thought about 1½d. per pound gross.

37. That would be equal to about 10 per cent.?—Yes; out of which the merchant has to pay bond charges, &c. The tobacco is often held in bond several months before it is sold, and the bond-charges, &c., have to be paid out of that. That is the gross profit.

38. Do you know anything about the quantity of tobacco carried in caddies?—It is bought in that form by the small retailer.

39. There is considerable consumption?—Yes.

40. They are sent out in special weights?—Yes; at what they are marked—generally 20 lb. weight.

41. Is there not a little profit to the wholesaler in those?—So far as I am personally concerned, there is none.

42. When the wholesale man sells those boxes of Juno who makes the profit on the light cases?—I understand they are sold at Customs weights. I am not positive on that point, but I have been told so.

43. The Customs people weigh the case. Do you know that boxes of Juno tobacco will sometimes weigh 168 lb. and sometimes 164: who gets the profit on the light cases?—If a case was invoiced at 168 lb. and the Customs weighed it at 164 lb., I think the merchant would sell that at 164 lb. to the retailer.

44. Do you think he does in boxes?—A single box he sells at 20 lb. weight. If he sells at 20 lb. weight he makes a slight profit on it.

45. When he is selling his tobacco does he not charge the assumed weight of the box?—Yes; but in other cases he sells at Customs weights.

46. Is it not contrary to trade custom?—I believe it is contrary to sell at anything under the marked weight of the box, but I believe it is often done. Of course, merchants when cutting against each other like to get a point when they can.

47. *The Chairman.*] Are you aware that the total manufactured tobacco imported last year was 2,136,000 lb. and 53,000 lb. unmanufactured?—Yes.

48. Your trade is rather more than half the value of that?—No; I said only the plug trade. I said it was a little more than half the plug trade of the colony.

EDWIN CHARLES BATKIN examined. (No. 4.)

49. *The Chairman.*] You are a retail tobacconist residing in Wellington?—Yes.

50. We just want to get some evidence from you in connection with the tobacco trade. Various representations have been made as to the manner in which retailers are bound to one company and have not the liberty that many of them would desire to deal with brands of tobacco manufactured by other companies. The result of the agitation has been that the matter has been brought under the notice of Parliament and referred to our Committee for investigation, and we want to find out, if possible, if there is anything in the representations which have been made, or whether the trade is run on right and proper lines. Perhaps you will be able to give us some evidence to throw light on the matter. Would you prefer to make a statement or answer questions?—I do not know that I can make a statement, but my evidence will be practically of a negative character. I will begin answering questions by asking one myself. What is the authority for the statement that the tobacconists are bound to any company—who says the tobacconists are bound to anybody?

51. We have had the matter brought up in Parliament, and I suppose it has been represented by some of the retailers to members that such is the case, and the result is that we are appointed to investigate and find out, if possible, if there is any truth in the statement?—I can only speak from my own experience as a retail tobacconist. I have been sixteen years in the business, and up to the present time have had no difficulty in buying what I wanted in the open market. I have had no pressure brought to bear on me as to whom I should deal with or anything of that kind. I am prepared to admit that some prices have gone up lately in some of the leading articles in our list of goods, but the increase has been but a small one, and not sufficiently large in the majority of cases to cause an increase in the retail price. That is with regard to the retail trade. With regard to what has come under my immediate notice in the wholesale trade, as to the restrictions on the sale of goods, I presume you are referring to the Imperial Tobacco Company?

52. Yes?—Those are the people you have before your eye all the time. I only know of one case in Wellington where a man has been dictated to as to what he should sell and what he should not sell.

53. *Mr. Aitken.*] You said that some of the prices of tobacco have gone up: can you tell the Committee whether that was in fancy or plug tobaccos?—Not entirely in plug tobacco, but in tinned tobacco there has been one advance.

54. Who owned the tobacco which has been raised in price?—The trust control it.

55. Can you inform me if the retail price at which you sell to the consumer has increased because of the higher price charged to the retailer?—I may say, practically in no instance.

56. No attempt has ever been made to dictate to you as to what tobaccos you shall sell or shall not sell?—No, I would not brook such dictation.

57. *Mr. Hardy.*] I presume you sell nearly all kinds of tobacco?—Practically all the tobaccos that sell in the colonial market.

58. Do you know anything about Juno?—Yes.

59. Do you know anything about the weights of Juno?—A little.