

petition in distribution, and guarantee definite profits to wholesale dealers who are members of the association, as against other outside merchants. Could these outside traders buy on the same terms as these favoured individuals, the price of sugar would probably be materially reduced to the public.

MEAT.

7. From evidence given to the Commission, it is affirmed that combination exists Meat. in various parts of New Zealand, fixing the retail prices of meat. It was alleged that the master butchers fixed their selling-rates, and put up a bond, generally fixed at £25, to observe fixed rates or forfeit this amount. The most direct evidence on this point was given by a Palmerston North witness named Erle Hampton (page 479), who is in business as a master butcher. In answer to questions this witness confessed that he had signed the agreement fixing prices, and that he had given his promissory note providing for payment of a penalty of £25 if he did not observe the selling-rates. This evidence was corroborated to some extent by R. S. Abraham, stock-auctioneer (page 465), of the same place, who stated that he knew there were fixed selling-rates, and that a bond was signed to ensure their observance. This witness doubted, however, whether the bond could be legally enforced.

In regard to the chief centres the evidence tendered before your Commissioners was not so conclusive, although there was evidence that a somewhat similar condition of affairs obtained at Auckland and at Dunedin. In these towns, however, there appeared to the Commission to be strong competition from retail butchers outside the association sufficient to keep the price within reasonable limits. There was no evidence in these towns that there was anything to prevent new businesses opening up—in fact, these witnesses went further and stated that there was nothing to prevent an outsider starting in competition with themselves, and selling at lower rates, if he thought undue profits were being made.

FISH.

8. Very conflicting evidence was given in regard to the supply and sale of fish. Fish. The outstanding characteristic appears to us to be the haphazard and unsatisfactory method of dealing with this important section of our food-supply. This phase of the matter, however, is dealt with in another section of the report. There does not appear to be any effective combine or monopoly in regard to the sale of fish. In Dunedin and Auckland your Commissioners found that the catch of the fishermen was limited to raise or steady prices. In Dunedin, T. J. McCutcheon, fish-hawker, stated (see pages 57–8, question 1), “The prices have gone up simply owing to the fact that these workers, both line and seine fishermen, have awakened to the fact that by combination they can control the market and raise the price.” This witness further added that he bought the fish at auction and that this market was free and open, and that generally fish was kept so low in price that the public would buy. Mr. F. J. Sullivan, wholesale fish-merchant, of Dunedin, affirmed (pages 7 and 8) that the market for the sale of fish was open and competitive. The practice above mentioned, of the fishermen limiting the catch, was confirmed by this witness (question 54, page 8). In Auckland the evidence of Mr. Garnaut, fisherman (page 356, question 5), showed that the fishermen fixed the wholesale price to the dealers.

The Commission regards the practice of fishermen limiting the catch as inimical to the best interests of the industry, and that an enlightened selfishness would lead to its abandonment. It was shown that the earnings of the men reached as much as £10 per head for fish caught during the week (Sullivan, page 9, question 60). This practice and the high cost of distribution are responsible for the fact that fish as a common article of diet is beyond the reach of the bulk of the population.

SHIPPING AND COAL.

9. That a monopoly exists in the carriage by sea of coal from the West Coast Shipping and Coal. ports is undoubted; and apparently the shipping companies that have effected the monopoly have each clearly defined “territory” on which the others do not trespass. Our investigations, necessarily incomplete owing to the limited time