

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

DUNEDIN.

TUESDAY, 4TH JUNE, 1912.

STEVE BOREHAM, General Labourer, examined on oath. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am a general labourer and tradesman sailmaker. I am a member of the Shearers' Union, and am also a blacksmith—in fact, one has to be everything now to earn a living.

2. Is it within your knowledge that the prices of commodities have risen within the last ten years?—Yes; prior to ten years ago you could buy a very good fat sheep for 1s.

3. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What year was that? The order of reference only goes back twenty years?—I am speaking of from 1891 to 1896. At that time you could buy a fat sheep for 1s.; and they used to take them round Oamaru and almost give them away.

4. *The Chairman.*] What part of the country was this?—Oamaru and all over Otago.

5. Are you alluding to times of drought?—No; and there were as good wages then as now.

6. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] That was the position before the freezer came into existence?—I am coming to that directly. In those years butter could be got at from 6d. to 8d. per pound: that was fresh butter. Potatoes were from 2s. to 5s. a bag—twelve bags to the ton; and bread was 4d. the 4 lb. loaf in those days.

7. You are speaking of town prices?—The prices in Oamaru at that time. I said butter was from 6d. to 1s.; I should have said from 6d. to 8d. If you guaranteed to take it from one farmer all the year round you could get it at 6d. per pound. Our family got it from one farmer in that way at that price. My family never paid more than 6d. per pound for butter. In regard to clothing, I notice no material difference in the price of clothing. I might say that in that direction wages have increased considerably. While there has been an increase in the price of bread, bakers' wages have not increased.

8. Has the difference in the duty on clothing made any difference?—The duty has made no difference to us—the prices are just the same: I have noticed that particularly. There is no difference in the price of clothing, either of tailor-made or slop-made suits: £1 5s. or £1 10s. was the price of a good ordinary man's suit, and the same articles are practically the same price now. Wages have increased in that line. I would like to tell you the wages in those days. The wages in those days was from 8s. to 10s. per day for the general labourer or worker. I was getting £3 a week of forty-eight hours for sailmaking, for which I am now paid £2 8s. per week of forty-eight hours. Shearing was not paid so much. At that time it was 15s. a hundred; now it is £1 a hundred. Harvesting was paid at 1s. 4d. an hour.

9. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] How many hours did you work for £3?—Forty-eight hours, and a half-holiday on Saturdays. The wages were from 1s. to 1s. 4d. an hour for harvesting. That used to be our nest-egg. We get no more for that sort of work now—we do not get as much. Now we will come down to the present time.

10. *The Chairman.*] Can you tell us what the different items you have mentioned are now?—Butter is now never lower than from 1s. to 1s. 6d.

11. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] When was it at 1s. 6d.? Can you give us definite information on that point?—In June of last year.

12. *The Chairman.*] That is, the retail price?—Yes. The farmers' price at the present time is from 4d. to 8d. per pound in the summer. I am speaking of dairy butter. I may instance the Taieri and Peninsula Company. There is practically no butter put on the market now direct from the farmer. It goes through the dairy companies.

13. *Mr. Robertson.*] At what period was the farmer getting from 4d. to 8d. for butter-fat?—In the summer-time. I may say that the farmer anticipates a dividend from the dairy factory, because that is a co-operative factory. The actual price paid out by the dairy factory is 8d.; and the retail price is now 1s. 4d. It ranges in price for the butter in the factory. When there is an abundance of milk and some extra trouble in extracting the butter-fat the price is 4d., and runs up to 8d. When the milk is richer and easier to get the farmer gets more for it.

14. Are those prices for butter-fat paid at the dairy factory?—Yes, for the actual butter-fat made up. The farmer receives that for it direct. I am dealing with the butter as it is packed in the factory ready to be sent to the grocer to sell. The farmer receives from 4d. to 8d. He never receives more than 8d. for the full pound of butter. I do not know what the price is for the butter-fat; but for the quantity of butter-fat that goes to make up a pound of butter he receives 8d.—that is, for the pound of butter.

15. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Have you any idea what the farmer gets for dairy butter?—The same price as the other. I may say that a man comes to my door and supplies us with butter at 1s. 2d. per pound.

16. That will be handled through a third party?—Yes, it is possible it is, but it is sold all the year round at that. There is very little of that butter on the market. The butter mostly goes through the co-operative factories. I am telling you what he gets from the factory direct.

17. *Mr. Robertson.*] Is the Taieri and Peninsula Company a co-operative company?—Yes; the farmers all participate in the profits of that company.