

that is the sole cause of the rise in our commodities. Mr. Matthewson, with whom I am dealing, has an agent who buys for a firm in London, and when he is buying for that firm he buys sheep for the Kensington butcher; and the butcher can get them much cheaper than by buying at Burnside. The result is that he can sell cheaper. He pays the same wages to his men.

72. That is the explanation: he is an export agent also?—Yes, he buys directly from the farmer: hence the lower price of his meat. The two men who run the shop at Kensington are prepared to come here and give evidence. The trade of the Kensington shop is a cash trade. The difference to my household expenses is 7s. 6d. a week on meat. Now, we will take potatoes.

73. You said they were 2s. for a bag?—Yes, from 2s. to 5s. That was in the years between 1890 and 1896. Now they fluctuate a little, but they are never much below £10 a ton.

74. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] I saw potatoes quoted in the paper the other day in Christchurch at very much lower than that?—The present rate is £10 a ton here retail. The very best sample at the present time at the railway-siding at Gore is £5 a ton wholesale.

75. What is the railage from Gore?—I could not say.

76. It would not be more than £1 a ton?—I do not know.

77. You say the farmer gets £5 a ton?—Yes. Take the very best sample: they are retailing them at more than £10 a ton, ranging up to £20 a ton for small quantities.

78. *Mr. Veitch.*] What are you paying for small lots?—10s. for a bag.

79. That is 5s. a cwt.: £5 a ton?—They sell them by the sack: twelve sacks to the ton.

80. What is the price of potatoes per sack?—About 18s. per sack. Four years ago potatoes were bought at £4 a ton at the siding at Oamaru, and they were selling in Dunedin at 15s. a sack.

81. That is £7 10s.?—Yes, but there is not 2 cwt. in a sack. There was a demand made for 18s. a sack by retailers, with the result that at the end of the winter seven hundred sacks were thrown away rotten. I may say that there are agents buying potatoes in the ground at from £2 15s. to £3 per ton.

82. *Mr. Hall.*] Do you mean that the men would dig them at that price?—No, the farmer digs them. The agent gets them at the siding at that price. The very best samples at the Gore Railway-station are selling at £5 a ton, and in Dunedin we are paying at the rate of £10 a ton retail. That shows the difference between the producer's price and the price the consumer pays. Now I come to the price of coal. There is no agent in the coal business. Here is a curious thing: While for fine, first-class coal, since the starting of the State coal-mines, the price is normal, yet the price of brown coal, which is the working-man's household coal, has increased from 15s. to 18s. to £1 and £1 4s. per ton. I refer to Green Island and Nightcaps and other lignite coal. I am not dealing with Kaitangata coal: that is a little bit beyond the working-man's coal. Since the starting of the State coal-mine brown coal has increased in price, whereas first-class coal has rather tended to decrease. Steamers, factories, &c., use the better-class coal. The result has been that the lignite-coal proprietors have put up the price of the coal used by the worker.

83. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] It is not usual in such cases to make things dearer: it is rather the other way?—Prior to the starting of the State coal-mine, engines for threshing-mills and shearing-machines, &c., used brown coal.

84. *Mr. Veitch.*] What is the price of brown coal per ton?—Up to £1 4s.

85. Is there a State coal-depot here?—Yes.

86. What is the price of Point Elizabeth State coal?—I do not know.

87. I cannot understand people paying £1 4s. a ton for brown coal when Point Elizabeth State coal is selling at the price it is?—I am talking of the retail business. The bags do not hold 2 cwt. The retail consumer now pays more for brown coal than he had to pay formerly. Now I want to deal with the fish business.

88. *The Chairman.*] You are not a fisherman?—No, but I was secretary of a fisherman's union, and I think I know something about the business.

89. When were you secretary?—Later than eighteen months ago.

90. *Mr. Veitch.*] What are the objects of the Fishermen's Union? Who are the members of the union, to begin with?—The Fishermen's Union of which I was secretary was the Trawler Fishermen's Union. There is another union—the Seine-net Union. This is a union of men who are, practically speaking, employers.

91. Are they the men who own small yachts and who fish with hook and line?—Yes, they use oil-launches. They formed a union and registered under the Arbitration Act. They could not state anything to go before the Court, because they are employers, practically. One of the principles for which the union has held out is that they can send no more than three dozen groper to the market each day—each boat containing two men.

92. Is that in the rules of the union?—No, the rules are registered, but the rules are *ultra vires*. The two or three men at the head of affairs are making use of the fact of their registration for the purpose of getting the other men to join their union. This is one of the effects of the union coming into existence: that the limit of groper that can be sent to the Dunedin market in one day, two men to one boat, is three dozen.

93. *The Chairman.*] Without any question as to weight?—Without any question as to weight.

94. *Mr. Robertson.*] Are they allowed to send any other fish at the same time?—Groper are the principal fish here, and they can catch groper at any time of the year.

95. They would be allowed to send barracouta and other fish, other than groper?—Yes, I think they can send any quantity.

96. *Mr. Veitch.*] Supposing they have caught, we will say, three dozen groper and then go on fishing for barracouta, and they catch one more groper, do they throw it overboard?—No, they keep it back till next day in case it is a bad day: so that the consumer has to be prepared for buying stinking fish.