

97. *Mr. Hall.*] Do they ever divide the catch with another boat?—No, but they give it to a man who has no boat at all to send away to another market. They are in tow with a man in Christchurch, and they send fish there.

98. *Mr. Veitch.*] Have they any written arrangement amongst themselves?—Yes.

99. Is there a written agreement, or is there a mutual understanding?—It is more than a mutual understanding. The secretary of the union asks a man if he will join the union, and if he does not join the union he has to pay from 15s. to £1 a case for benzine; whereas if he joins the union he gets the benzine for 10s. a case. That is the inducement for him to join the union.

100. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Do you mean that the sale of benzine is a trust?—I mean that the secretary of the union deals with one firm, and they give him a commission of 10s. a case for selling the benzine to the fishermen.

101. Benzine is an open market?—You cannot buy benzine at 10s. a case.

102. That is owing to the shortage?—But he can get it at 10s.

103. There is no such thing as a corner in benzine here with the two principal companies. It is an open market?—Yes, with regard to the two companies you refer to, but the secretary of the union delivers benzine at 10s. a case, and that is the inducement to fishermen to join the union.

104. *Mr. Veitch.*] We want something that carries proof with it?—I swear to that fact.

105. *The Chairman.*] How can you swear to that?—I am doing business with a man who wants to drag out of the union. He has instructed me to buy 100 cases of benzine at 10s. a case. I find that it can be got by one person for 8s. 6d.

106. Probably these people bought at 8s. 6d. and are selling at 10s.?—Yes; but why should they cut off our fish-supply when they are already making a profit in that direction? Now, with regard to rent: Prior to ten years ago, speaking of Oamaru, and just prior to ten years ago in Dunedin, you could get a four-roomed house for 8s. a week. Now you cannot get a house worth living in under 12s. or 13s. a week.

107. *Mr. Robertson.*] You are referring to the same years you mentioned before—from 1890 to 1896?—Yes.

108. *Mr. Macdonald.*] What do you say the rent in Dunedin is now?—When I came here ten years ago the rent of a four-roomed house was 8s.; now the rent has increased to 12s. 6d. a week.

109. The Labour Department's figures do not bear that out: they say 10s. 6d.?—There is a four-roomed house hardly fit for a respectable pig to live in, the rent of which house is 12s. 6d. a week. Evidently the Department knows very little about that. To-day £1 a week is charged for a seven-roomed house.

GEORGE JOACHIM, Managing Director of the Westport Coal Company, examined on oath. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are manager of the Westport Coal Company?—I am managing director of the Westport Coal Company.

2. Amongst the issues this Commission is asked to consider there is one, No. 9, which says, "What effect, if any, has the labour legislation had on the increase in the price of the commodities of life?" You have been working under several awards of the Arbitration Court, have you not?—Yes.

3. Has the effect of those awards been to raise wages?—Yes.

4. Has that increase in wages affected the price charged for coal?—No, it has not. The company, so far, has borne the increase out of their own pockets.

5. Has there been any rise in the price of coal of late years?—There has been quite recently an increase in the price, but the wholesale price of coal during the last ten years has been 5 per cent. reduced on the ten years previous to that.

6. Can you explain how it is that you have been able to pay increased wages and yet be able to sell coal at a cheaper price?—We have made less profits. In times past when business was better we provided better output plant, and made better facilities for delivering coal, and we have been gradually eating up those advantages by the increase in the cost of labour.

7. The projected advantages you thought you were going to gain you are not now gaining?—We are not.

8. *Mr. Macdonald.*] There has been an upward tendency in the price of coal?—There has been no rise, except within the last few months, so far as I remember, for the last ten years.

9. Are the retailers paying more for Westport coal than they were previously?—I do not know how it is with outside places, but in Dunedin the price is 20 per cent. less retail than it was ten years ago. That has been accomplished by distributing the coal ourselves, and taking the profit which used to go to the middleman and giving it to the consumer.

10. *The Chairman.*] Was the establishment of the State coal-mine service of assistance to you in helping to eliminate the middleman?—I really do not know. We had our retail yards here long before the State established theirs. Possibly competition might have sharpened us up.

11. You would say that if there had been a rise in the cost of living it has not been contributed to in any way by the Westport Coal Company?—Certainly not by the cost of coal.

12. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] If the price of coal is 20 per cent. less now, it must have been dearer to the consumer between 1890 and 1900?—Yes.

13. *Mr. Hall.*] What is the present price of household coal?—£1 15s. per ton to the public.

14. *Mr. Robertson.*] That is by the ton?—Yes; in smaller quantities the price is slightly larger.

15. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Have you the same facilities for distributing coal in Christchurch as in Dunedin?—Yes; and also in Oamaru, Timaru, and other places.

16. Have you a uniform charge?—No, it depends on freights, and port charges, and handling. In some places we have better facilities for handling than in other places. The coal goes direct from the wharf to the yard in Dunedin.