

55. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] The duty on tinned fish is 2d. a pound. Fresh herrings could be sold at 4½d. a tin if there was no duty. Do you think there would be a largely increased sale of tinned fish if the duty of 2d. a pound was taken off?—Yes, I believe there would. I can remember that a few years ago when the price of tinned pineapples came down there was an enormous increase in the sales of that commodity.

56. What is the present price of herrings and tomato-sauce?—7½d.

57. They could be sold at 5d. under these conditions?—Yes.

58. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Do you own your premises, or do you pay rent?—The buildings are ours, but the land is leasehold.

59. Has your rent risen during the last ten years?—Our ground lease will not be up for some years yet.

60. It has been stated that there has been a big rise in land-values: has that increase any effect on the price of selling commodities?—It has either to come out of the profits of the shopkeeper or be put on to his goods.

61. Who bears it—the consumer or the shopkeeper?—I think the shopkeeper has very often to bear it. I know that when I was in George Street our rent was raised 15s. a week, and I understand there has been an advance since then.

62. You did not hand that on to the consumer?—No, it came out of the profits.

63. *Mr. Robertson.*] The rent in George Street may only be half what it is in Princes Street, but the price you sell at is still the same?—That is so.

64. If the man in George Street is selling cheese at, say, 7d. a pound, the grocer in Princes Street would have to sell it at that price too?—That is so.

ALEXANDER LOWRIE, Journalist, Invercargill, examined on oath. (No. 18.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are a journalist, residing in Invercargill?—Yes.

2. Have you any information that you can give the Commission bearing upon the question of the rise in the cost of living?—I am well aware from my own personal experience, and also from the experience of others with whom I have come in contact, that house-rents have increased very perceptibly during the last ten years. I have in mind a house that I occupied ten years ago, which cost me 17s. 6d. a week. To-day it is let at 22s. 6d. a week. The repairs which have been effected meanwhile have only been of a minor nature, and the rates, I should think, have increased something like 10 per cent. in the interval.

3. Those rates are paid by the landlord?—Yes, they do not affect the tenant.

4. Is that house fairly representative of a large class of houses in Invercargill?—Yes, a six-roomed house about a mile from the Post-office.

5. And other houses have increased in the like ratio?—Yes. I might say that six-roomed houses are now in greater demand than they were perhaps at that time. At that time people seemed to be content to live in four- or five-roomed houses; now they like something better.

6. Four or five-roomed houses have advanced in the same ratio as the six-roomed houses?—The rents indicate that they have. I am now living in a property of my own. A four-roomed house adjacent to mine, two miles from the Post-office, is let at 12s. a week. I understand that that is a fair sample of the rents of that class of house situated at that distance from the centre of the town.

7. Has the value of land for residential sites gone up very much in Invercargill?—Very much; I should say it has increased by quite 100 per cent. in ten years, taking it all round. A great deal of speculation has gone on in land.

8. The house you speak of could not have had its rent-value increased by the cost of material, having been built ten years ago; therefore any recent rise in the cost of material would not have affected that house?—No.

9. Are houses in Invercargill being built for renting so much now, or are workers getting their own houses now through building societies or Advances to Workers?—The tendency is for many persons to take advantage of the assistance of building societies more than the Advances to Workers Department. A great many men who hitherto paid rent are now purchasing their own homes on the time-payment system.

10. Yet, in spite of that, rented houses are still increasing in rental value?—Yes, rents are still increasing yearly.

11. Has the cost of the necessities of life, such as bread, meat, soap, candles, &c., increased in price?—From my own personal experience, they have gone up; but I cannot offer any opinion as to the reason for the increase.

12. Can you give us any idea of what the percentage of increase has been during ten years?—I should think, 10 or 15 per cent., probably. There must be a very wide margin between the actual cost of produce to the grocer and what it is retailed at to the consumer. I know that in potatoes there is a very wide margin.

13. Can you give us any specific instance—prices that the producer has received, and the prices the goods are retailed at in the shops?—When potatoes are being bought at £4 a ton from the farmer—that is the price to the grocer on the trucks—they are being retailed at about £9 and £10; that is, in small lots at, say, ¼ cwt. to ½ cwt.: that is practically double.

14. Does the same rule obtain for other produce, such as vegetables?—I think not. That does not affect us very much. A great many householders in Invercargill grow their own vegetables.

15. And meat?—Meat has increased. The price delivered by the butchers has been very high. I think that probably is due in many instances to people rather living luxuriously—refraining from carrying a parcel home. They prefer to have the goods delivered at their doors, which naturally increases the cost.