

43. *The Chairman.*] As much difference as in the case of potatoes?—I would not like to say, but probably about that.

44. That is about 100 per cent. ?—Yes; I do not say that potatoes have always been sold at that increase, but I remember a particular instance some two months ago.

45. *Mr. Veitch.*] Do you know anything about rural land?—Rural land has likewise increased in value—perhaps not 100 per cent. all round.

46. To what do you attribute that increase?—Probably to the easy terms under which land is taken up. In many cases easy terms have been granted. I know instances where men have gone on the land without putting down any deposit—simply walked into the farm.

47. Do you think the rates of interest have had anything to do with it?—It is just possible they have. At all events, the easy terms under which town lands can be obtained has had a great deal to do with the prices paid for building allotments.

48. *Mr. Robertson.*] Has dairying increased very much in the vicinity of Invercargill?—Yes; a great deal of land which has been hitherto devoted to the depasturing of sheep has now been given over to dairying.

49. That might account for some of the increase in value?—Probably, especially when it is possible to have a dairy factory.

50. Do you know anything of the existence of any body in the nature of a merchants' association in Invercargill?—I cannot say. It is possible that there is such an association. I know that the retailers have a combination which regulates the prices for produce, but beyond that I am not aware of any. There are very few wholesale merchants in Invercargill.

51. You mean that the combination you refer to regulates the price of local produce?—Yes, the prices at which they purchase and at which they sell.

52. *Mr. Veitch.*] Do you know anything about the distribution of fish in Invercargill?—Yes. Until recently fish has been exceptionally scarce there, but I do not know very much in respect to the price of it. I know that prices recently, since fish have become plentiful, have been comparatively low. Large-sized gropers were being sold at 2s. 6d. each.

53. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What weight?—I should say, 10 lb. and 12 lb. weight for 2s. 6d. That is when fish is plentiful. I do not say that is the regular price. I understand the regular price for grouper to be 4d. per pound.

54. Is it your opinion that the price of fish is regulated automatically by the law of supply and demand?—We use a large quantity of fish in our household; we consider it one of the cheapest articles of diet we can get.

MICHAEL JOSEPH FORDE, Journalist, Invercargill, examined. (No. 19.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are a journalist and a member of the United Labour Party?—Yes.

2. That partly recently included the Housewives' Union?—Yes.

3. Can you tell us what influence the Housewives' Union has had in regard to altering the prices of food-supplies to its members in Invercargill?—The only thing that has effectually been done so far has been in regard to milk. They have tried to do a lot; they expect to do a lot; but the only thing they have done so far has been to reduce the price of milk. It was sold to them at the rate of 1s. 4d. per gallon, and they now obtain it at the rate of 1s. per gallon, which means that the members of the Housewives' Union get their milk at 4d. per gallon cheaper. It also means giving the producer 5d. a gallon more than he was obtaining from the retailer.

4. *Mr. Macdonald.*] They went direct to the producer and cut out the retailer altogether?—Yes.

5. *The Chairman.*] Has the Housewives' Union done anything in respect to bread, meat, or coal?—They endeavoured to deal with the butchers, and they have had one offer. We expected the Commission down at Invercargill, and I have not come prepared with figures such as you would get if you went down there. With regard to meat, the Housewives' Union were also in treaty with the butchers, and I understand that at least two butchers have offered to deliver meat to the members of the union at 1d. per pound less all round. Nothing definite has been done; but I think I am right in saying that at least two distinct offers have been made to the secretary of the Housewives' Union, who is my wife.

6. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] 1d. per pound would represent 20 per cent. off the net profits of the butcher: that is an extraordinary position?—I understand that the position is as I have stated.

7. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Do the members guarantee each other's accounts?—They were going to inaugurate the coupon system.

8. *The Chairman.*] What has been the effect of the coupon system in Invercargill on the price of bread?—It is bad. As to the effect of the coupon system in the lessening of prices, it has been an absolute disappointment. When the bakers first instituted the coupon system they said it would be a good thing. The drawback is that the workers do not get their wages in advance the same as the bakers are paid in advance under that system. The bakers stated that in a very short time they would be in a position, if circumstances did not alter, to reduce the price of bread; but since then bread has gone up 1d. a loaf. If a householder is absent for an afternoon, even if he has purchased the coupons ahead, and even if the baker knows he has coupons in hand, they will not leave the bread at the door. They have become absolute autocrats. Each baker forfeits £25 to his association if he breaks his agreement with the association. The bakers have a union.

9. It is that system which allowed them to raise the price of bread by 1d.?—Yes, it showed them their strength.

10. So that the effect has been to make the people pay 1d. per loaf more for their bread?—Yes.

11. *Mr. Macdonald.*] What do they get for their bread?—I will send you that information in a statement from Invercargill.