

46. *Mr. Robertson.*] That would have the greatest effect on inland towns?—Yes. I may say that people who hold land with timber charge enormous prices for the timber. I know of cases where men bought the land and timber for £1 an acre, and they are getting £5 an acre for the timber.

47. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Have you anything to say about coal?—The coal question is a matter of great importance in connection with the cost of living. Recently the Housewives' Union at Invercargill decided to combine and get their coal in quantity, but when they went to the coal-merchants or coalowners they refused to supply the coal in that way, although they advertised larger quantities at a reduced price. I would like to mention that in the Wairio and Nightcaps district there is an unlimited supply of superior coal. The whole district appears to have an underlying bed of coal. A request has been made that the State should extend the railway four or five miles into that coal-bearing district. If that were done it would mean reducing the cost of living so far as coal is concerned by at least one-half.

48. Is that Crown land?—The greater portion is Crown land. It is being leased to anybody who likes to start a coal-pit there. The expenditure of a few thousand pounds would mean supplying Otago and Southland with cheap coal. At the present time the people are handicapped through having to wagon the coal for six or seven miles over an unformed road. If it comes *via* Nightcaps it is charged 2s. 6d. royalty. I wish the Commission would bring this matter under the notice of the Government. It would be a great shame to let all this coal get into the hands of private individuals to make a monopoly of it.

49. With respect to the refusal of the coalowners to supply truck-loads: how is Westport coal sold—through agents, or have they their own distributing arrangements?—They have agents. We only approached the Nightcaps company.

50. *Mr. Robertson.*] Westport coal would be a higher price than Nightcaps?—Yes.

51. *Mr. Veitch.*] Was it the Nightcaps company that advertised that it was prepared to sell by the truck-load?—Yes, and a combination of the workers was refused, and we were told to go to the coal-merchants.

52. With regard to the new coalfield: do you think it would be expensive to work?—No; there is only 6 ft. of stripping required in many places.

53. What do you mean by the charge of 2s. 6d. royalty?—For loading at the company's private siding. It costs 6s. per ton to wagon the coal at Wairio.

54. *The Chairman.*] With respect to the price of land at Invercargill?—We have been suffering very much under pressure of high rents and high cost of living. There is land adjacent to Invercargill which I think the Government should take up. It has been offered to them several times. Six years ago some land there was sold for £30 an acre. Private speculators got hold of it and cut it up into sections, and sold it for £400 an acre six years afterwards. Twelve years ago that land was sold at £9 an acre. The Municipality expended about £70,000 in extending the tramways. That meant benefiting speculators, and the rates to the people were increased. The Government or Municipality ought to have acquired that land, and thus enabled the people to get homes at a reasonable price. In consequence of the high price of land it is impossible for the worker to acquire a home of his own.

55. The ground-rent is so heavy?—Yes. For a quarter-acre section inside the Town Belt you have to pay from £250 to £300. The great trouble is in connection with the high price of land.

56. What would be the average cost of building a four-roomed cottage?—I should say about £250.

57. *Mr. Hall.*] Do the local authorities compel syndicates to form roads and metal them before they can offer the land for sale?—I believe so. We have no Government workers' homes in Invercargill. The consequence is that rents have gone up 20 per cent. If cheaper homes and cheaper fuel were provided it would be a great help to the working-class.

The Hon. JOHN THOMAS PAUL, M.L.C., Journalist, examined on oath. (No. 23.)

1. *The Chairman.*] I understand, Mr. Paul, that you, together with the secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, have come to give evidence on behalf of the Council?—Yes, and in addition to that I would like to say something about the clothing industry and some other matters. I propose to shortly show that the cost of living must increase because we at the present time are following a system of production and distribution which must be wasteful. I understand that the Commission is limited to time, and that it is inadvisable to engage in a discussion of theories. Whatever theory I put forward is based absolutely on the facts of the position. Take the question of distribution. A man with a sense of humour in the Old Country wrote a pamphlet comparing milk and postage-stamps, and drew a parallel between the distribution of letters by the State and the ineffectiveness and waste in the distribution of milk by a number of carts delivering milk in the same street, and each cart then rushing off to another part of the city, cart following cart on the same rounds distributing milk. I say you cannot have products delivered by that method at their real cost. All the wages of the drivers of the carts, and the capital cost of the carts and horses employed, must be paid by some one, and the consumer must pay them. When we grumble about the cost of living we must understand it is largely because of the method of distribution, and I instance the milk-distributing as a fair example of what goes on with the butcher, baker, and grocer, and those who serve us with our everyday requirements.

2. You mean to say that the greater the competition the greater the waste?—Exactly. Of course, now, in many cases competition is out of the question altogether, or to a very large extent, but the waste is still greater. Take the case of milk, again. Milk is supplied at a uniform price, and in addition to the wasteful form of distribution we have to pay the extra price the producer asks. If we take the case of production we find that the position is the same, and I propose to give the Commission a specific case. I am not going to mention the name of the industry involved. The price is fixed for the manufacture of an article. It is fixed on a basis which will pay the least