

10. Could you make us a short statement on the subject to enlighten the Commission as to how the difference arises?—If a man has got to deliver meat he has the expense of keeping horses and carts, and he has the expense of the extra labour. The cost of labour now is so high that it is a very important factor, and a man delivering meat cannot deliver much—a very much smaller proportion than a man selling it in a shop. It takes a man a lot longer to cut up a joint and put it in the cart, and deliver it, in some cases a long way from the shop, than if a man is selling meat over the counter.

11. What has the rise of the wages of butcher's assistants been during the past ten years?—That is within the period of the labour laws.

12. What has the Arbitration Court done in the way of raising the wages of butchers' assistants?—Before the labour laws came about you could get a young man of from eighteen to twenty-two or twenty-three years of age for £1 a week and found. Now the minimum is £2 11s., and from that to £3 10s.—head shopman.

13. What did you do in regard to "finding" men in those days?—I had no experience of that.

14. Would you not have considered that the price then given was a fair wage—I am speaking before the Court raised the wages?—No, I consider it was sweating for a man of twenty-two years of age.

15. Therefore you do not find fault with the Arbitration Court for having raised the wages of butchers' assistants?—No, their wages are not too high.

16. Has that been carried on to the price of meat in what you would consider a fair proportion?—Yes, certainly, it must be so.

17. Would that account for the greater part of the rise that you have mentioned?—No, there are other reasons besides that. That is partly the cause.

18. Would you kindly tell us to the best of your belief what are other causes which have raised the price of meat, besides those you have mentioned?—The Home market controls the price of mutton here very largely. Before frozen meat was being used there would be occasionally—in fact, very often—a glut in the market here. The consequence was that growers suffered, while the public had the benefit. If mutton is selling well at Home, naturally the frozen-meat buyers for Home come into competition with the butchers.

19. Do you pay the Home prices?—Yes, we have to compete with them. At the present time we are suffering from that competition very largely.

20. Does the best class of meat go out of the country?—Yes; of course, they also send out second-class meat, especially at a time like the present when there is a strong demand for meat at Home.

21. Is there any combination to keep up the retail prices of meat?—No, there is nothing of the sort. Our business would stop anything of that sort in any case.

22. Would you describe the particular nature of your business: is it a check on such a combination?—Our business was started about three years ago. The idea was to do away with credit and delivery. We recognize that it has made a great deal of difference. Our business supplies the public with the best class of meat at the lowest rate, allowing for no delivery and no credit.

23. That is to say, the public buys it over the counter and takes the meat away?—Yes, we have an immense business on those lines.

24. Could you give us any idea of the price at which you sell and the price at which the delivery butcher sells? For instance, what do you sell steak at?—We sell beef steak at 5d. and rump steak at 7d.

25. What do the delivery butchers sell it at?—I cannot tell you much about their prices. We sell mutton chops at 3d., and I know that in those shops they sell it at 5d. and 6d. Our best cuts of beef are 4½d. and 5½d. per pound.

26. Their prices you would consider fair for those who wish to have their goods delivered?—Yes.

27. Would you consider the difference between 3d. and 5d. in mutton was a fair delivery charge?—No, I think that is a very high charge; but I think they would want 1d. per pound for delivery. Delivery means booking as well. Some persons reckon ½d., but I do not think it enough. I would rather sell the meat at even 1d. per pound cheaper in the shop, as I am doing, than have the bother of delivery and have the 1d. more.

28. Supposing there was some central store at which persons taking delivery over the counter could be supplied, would not that save overlapping?—In our business you want individuality: experience has proved that. Large companies have tried it, and it seems impossible to make them pay. Companies are all admitting that their retail places do not pay. In a company's business you cannot get any one to take a personal interest in it—which our business seems to want. You have so many little things to deal with. It is not just a matter of selling the meat. If you have not some one overlooking the stuff continually there are liable to be serious losses.

29. You seem to consider that there is a margin in the price that might be saved. Tell us how that could be saved—I mean between a fair price for delivery and the cash system?—In the cost of delivery and the cost of booking—that is where the margin there comes in. I was alluding to other things. There are so many little side issues in our business that want individual attention, and it seems impossible to get that attention from managers. That has been the experience of companies which have started retail businesses.

30. *Mr. Hall.*] You referred to credit: do you think there is much lost through bad debts, in addition to the cost of keeping the books?—I can only speak generally; but it must be so—it always is so.

31. *The Chairman.*] You have no general knowledge of their business?—No.

32. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What percentage of the retail trade is supplied from the abattoirs here?—All. We are not allowed to bring anything into the town that has not passed through the abattoirs.