

23. With regard to other kinds of coal: can they buy direct from the pit?—They can buy from the Westport Coal Company, or Stockton Company, or Blackball Company; these are all represented here, or have branches.

24. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] The Westport Coal Company sell to the public direct: they have no middleman handling their coal?—Yes, direct to the public, and they sell to the merchants as well.

25. They have two sets of prices?—Yes.

26. That was not the case in Dunedin. What are the charges on coal from the ship's slings into store?—The railage, 4s. 9d. per ton (imported coal); cartage to various yards averages 2s. per ton at present.

27. If coal is taken from the truck into the yards there is only the addition of 4s. 9d. per ton?—Well, we have got the discharging-costs. You could not bag direct from truck at sidings—there is no time; only a few hours is allowed us. It is rarely you are lucky enough to save the extra handling. There are only some three or four private sidings, and they pay a high rent.

28. You are quite certain that in your local association there is no penalty for breaking prices, such as expulsion from membership?—I am certain of that.

29. Have you a printed price-list?—I believe there is one. I would not be certain of that. I can let you have one if available.

30. Can you remember who signs the printed list?—No, I do not remember. We are out of the retail business, and have been for two years and a half.

31. *Mr. Robertson.*] How is most of the coal sold here—what quantities, small or by the ton, to householders?—I think there are more smaller quantities than ton lots sold. The usual way is quarter-ton, half-ton, and so forth, and some in lesser quantities, in bags. In the very small yards the bag and the hundred still pertains, but in the larger yards they try to stop that because of extra cost of delivery; it adds considerably to the cost.

32. What are about the usual charges for bags and per quarter-ton?—I think I am correct in saying that the quarter-ton of the Maitland or Newcastle is 10s. per quarter.

33. And by the bag it would be more?—Yes, more in proportion, because of the cost of delivery.

34. You could not give us the exact price?—I am not sure of it.

35. Most sales are in small quantities for householders?—It would be hard to answer that accurately. One man might have a number of small customers; another man larger customers.

36. *The Chairman.*] Is there anything within your knowledge which has not been brought out by the questions?—You asked me about the State competition—if that made any difference. It made no difference whatever as to the prices. The coal man could not reduce his selling-prices and live.

37. What was the State coal selling at when they started? Is it not lower now?—It was 30s. when they started, 31s. to-day.

38. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] The cost is greater in handling coal in Christchurch than in Dunedin?—Yes, there is a 1s. penalty on Newcastle coal as imported coal as against local coal. The railage is 3s. 9d. for the local coal, and 4s. 9d. for imported.

39. You say the State coal was 30s. and 31s.?—30s. was the price prior to the rise. I am speaking of best screened coal for household uses; that is what I have quoted for all through.

40. *The Chairman.*] Why do people buy from you for 39s. when they can get Port Elizabeth coal for 31s.?—Well, we think the Newcastle coal is superior.

41. Evidently the people of Christchurch think so too?—Oh, yes, the Maitland coal is the finest coal south of the Line.

WILLIAM MINTY, Factory-manager of the Kaiapoi Clothing Company, examined on oath. (No. 53.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Have you had a long experience as a clothing-manufacturer?—A lifelong experience. For the last eight years I have been in Christchurch.

2. Can you tell us if there has been any very great rise to the public in the cost of clothing during that time?—I can only answer for the costs as affected by labour in the matter of production. It is not within my jurisdiction to determine the selling-prices: that affects the warehouse. I have no jurisdiction over the material—the lines are supplied by the piece, and the factory supplies the labour and necessary trimming.

3. Has the price of that labour gone up considerably in the last ten years through the awards of the Arbitration Court?—Very much. By comparison of the wages it works out 37½ per cent. relating to the journeywomen; that is since 1902 that rise has taken place. That increase applies only to the women; the increase in the wages of male operatives is 10 per cent.

4. Do you know what ratio the labour-cost bears to the cost of materials?—I have no jurisdiction over that; I have no more knowledge of the cost of material than you have, sir; that does not come within my province.

5. Have you nearly the same class of worker that you had ten years ago?—Much the same, I think; there are continual changes being made, but I suppose the qualifications are much the same as before.

6. Have you any difficulty in getting female hands now?—Very great difficulty. I think during the last five years we have experienced greater difficulty, and I attribute that to the greater prosperity. We are losing a good many women by reason of their being married, and being taken away for domestic purposes.

7. And if there was general prosperity a man would be able to keep his children at home longer?—That has been our experience.

8. Have you any observations to make on the question of a rise in the cost of living?—None, sir; I can only speak of what has taken place in our own business, and the figures I have given I am prepared to substantiate.