

FISHING INDUSTRY.

The Department has investigated the marketing of fish in the principal cities of the Dominion, and efforts have been made in the direction of bringing the fishermen and consumers into more direct touch. The facilities at the ports for handling the fishermen's catches are inadequate; much time is lost, and in some cases the delays result in consignments of fish being too late for trains to inland towns. This causes loss to the fishermen and inconvenience to residents in country districts. The Department has co-operated with the fishermen in their efforts to obtain improved appliances for landing their catches expeditiously.

Owing to the lack of cool storage for fish at our ports it is impossible during certain periods to dispose of the full amount of the catches; for this reason the tendency of the fishermen is to limit the quantity of fish sent forward to the markets. The economic loss to the Dominion is obvious. If freezing accommodation was available at the ports a regular supply to the country districts could be maintained, while it would be possible also to increase largely our export trade.

With the abundant supply of excellent fish around our shores it should be possible, by assistance to the fishermen in the way of providing up-to-date methods of handling, cool storage, and transportation, to develop this important industry to an almost unlimited extent.

GAS.

In its 1918 report the Board of Trade advocated payment for gas according to thermal units, but as the result of an investigation of the accounts and the conditions under which the industry was carried on in New Zealand, the Department in its last report stated that until sufficient supplies of coal were available to permit of a certain degree of standardization of the raw materials for gasmaking, a system of payment on the calorific value of gas would not be equitable. So long as manufacturers were obliged to use allocated coals of varying carbonizing-quality the cost of the gas produced differed accordingly, but now that the coal-supply has returned to a state of normality the Department renews its advocacy of the system of payment on a calorific basis, and with that end in view inquiries are being made to ascertain whether or not the system can be established by means of regulations under the Board of Trade Act. The gas companies have passed through a somewhat critical period, but the outlook is again brighter, and a reduction in the price of gas, in addition to small reductions already effected, should be reasonably possible in the near future.

LEGAL ACTION.

During the past year economic conditions have been such that sellers of commodities have been forced to sell at prices which in many instances do not even cover the cost of production and distribution. The tendency towards a lower price-level and the abundant supplies of commodities in general have increased competition among sellers at a time when demand has for several reasons been much restricted.

Under these circumstances there has been little necessity for action by the Department towards ensuring that prices and profits are not unreasonably high. Minor complaints have been received in regard to particular sales, and these, as well as the position of industries taken as a whole, have been subject to investigation. In no case, however, has there been sufficient grounds to warrant the taking of legal action under section 32 of the Board of Trade Act.

A breach of regulations relative to bread prices (made under section 26 of the Act) was made the subject of prosecution, and a fine was imposed.

Generally it may be said, therefore, that the force of competition among sellers has provided an adequate safeguard against profiteering, and while this condition of affairs exists there should be little necessity for taking restrictive action provided for under certain sections of the Act.

CONCLUSION.

While it is generally recognized that the prosperity of the Dominion is closely dependent upon the well-being of the primary and extractive industries of our country, it must not be overlooked that the production of the secondary industries also contributes largely to our total of consumable wealth. The direct products of the soil are, under the present circumstances of our national economy, essentially the coin with which we pay our external debts and purchase our essential imports. This fact and the tendency to focus attention upon external trade doubtless causes us to overlook in some degree the importance of paying adequate regard to the national production as a whole. Local production for local use and development is, unit for unit, of equal importance with that great volume of production which is annually sent overseas; and, while every effort must be made to increase our primary production and to give all possible encouragement to the extractive industries, there is at the same time a great field of effort open to our people in the development of those secondary industries suited to the economic circumstances of the Dominion. Our natural resources and advantages are many and varied, and a well-balanced national progress demands that no portion of these resources should remain undeveloped. The Dominion's great need of increased population can be met by a simultaneous increase in the opportunities for human endeavour in all departments of our national production. Co-operation between all classes of producers and a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties which must be faced are vitally necessary in the interests of the country as a whole.

It is with a realization of these undoubted facts, and with an unbounded confidence in the industrial future of our country, that the Department will continue to bend its energies towards the development of the industries and trades of the Dominion.

W. G. McDONALD, Chairman.

J. W. COLLINS,

Secretary, Department of Industries and Commerce.

1st August, 1922.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (750 copies), £16.

By Authority: W. A. G. SKINNER, Government Printer, Wellington.—1922.

Price 6d.]