

to the proprietary people alone. The fixation of prices may be a guarantee to the retailer so far as he is concerned, but it does not protect the worker against high prices. Again, I take the proprietary articles and the commodities that we use which are sold on the market, and compare them with the commodity that the worker sells—namely, labour-power. On the other hand, we have an independent tribunal adjusting the price of that commodity—that is, the price of labour. The worker in this country is not allowed to say, “I will sell it for so much.” He is debarred by law from withholding his commodity; he must sell it at a price stated by an independent tribunal. He buys proprietary articles, and the manufacturer who owns those proprietary articles claims the right to charge whatever price he pleases for the other commodities. That is obviously unfair to one side of the community. I have no objection to the fixation of prices if they are fixed by a public tribunal—absolutely none; but I have a strong objection to the owner of a commodity fixing his price while another man is selling his commodity—namely, labour—without consideration, and which he must sell to live, in order to buy the commodity that the other man sells at his price. I submit that the position is absolutely unfair. On the other hand, sir, I want to make it quite clear that I do not advocate low prices or cut prices for commodities. I believe that the price of the commodity should be at least sufficiently high to enable the manufacturer or the distributor to pay decent wages to the men employed, and thereby generally enable the people who handle these commodities to maintain a reasonable standard of living. As I say, I am not in favour of cut prices; but I am certainly not in favour of one section of the community deciding what price the other section of the community shall sell at while the owner of another commodity has no power in that direction. Now, in every commodity that I am aware of in the world there is a certain amount of labour-power crystallized in that commodity. You cannot get away from it. That is the view we take in connection with the fixation of prices of commodities generally. There is just another matter that I would like to draw attention to and it is this; it is stated here that there would be no fixation of prices on foodstuffs.

*Mr. Collins:* That is the law.

*Witness:* Yes, that is the law; but there would be fixation on house-rents. We have a Parliament in this country that can alter these things from time to time. There would be fixation of house-rents, but the landlord would fix the price. So far as I understand, the claim is that the P.A.T.A. will fix the price themselves. How far is this going to extend? It applies to washing-soap, &c. to-day; it might apply to houses to-morrow. Apart from that, I want to point out that certain people who manufacture goods in New Zealand are given the privilege of fixing the price of these goods, or import these goods and allow them to fix the prices. I say it would be grossly unfair to the producing farmer to deny him the same privilege of selling his butter and cheese; it would be grossly unfair to the worker who sells his labour. If we are going to have fixation of prices, let us have it generally, or let us not have it at all. We ask this Committee to view the working-man's point of view in this matter. As I say, he has his wages fixed by an independent tribunal, and therefore I say the same should apply so far as this particular matter is concerned.

6. *Mr. Myers.*] I suppose, Mr. Roberts, you appreciate the fact that nowadays, without the P.A.T.A., a manufacturer is not in a position to fix his price—that is, proprietary articles?—I do not think so. I do not appreciate those facts, and I will not accept them.

7. I do not care whether you accept it or not, but it is a fact?—He can fix it at certain limits, but as soon as they get the business the prices go back again. That has happened thousands of times in New Zealand.

8. I want you to confine your attention for a moment to what we call proprietary articles?—What are proprietary articles?

[At this stage Mr. Myers mentioned Palmolive soap as an instance.]

9. I want you to assume, if you will—because it is the position—that the manufacturer of an article like Palmolive soap is in a position to say at what price goods should be sold wholesale and retail, and I want you to assume that if a person who purchased his goods and sells them at a lower price than is provided for the manufacturer can obtain an injunction from the Supreme Court to prevent it?—For your purpose I will assume it.

10. Is that what you are objecting to?—No. I am objecting to what may be termed unfair trading by these people—that is to say, these people saying, “We will all join together in connection with certain proprietary articles, and will put them on the market and charge our own prices,” while at the same time they will not allow the men who work for them to do the very same thing so far as they are concerned.

11. I quite understand you. Then, your assumption is, I take it, that the P.A.T.A. is going to fix prices?—Yes.

12. And what you object to is the P.A.T.A. fixing prices?—If the P.A.T.A. is the proprietary people, yes.

13. But supposing the P.A.T.A. are not the proprietary people—perhaps you misunderstand me—and that the prices remain fixed just as they are now, by the manufacturer himself, and not by the P.A.T.A., what do you say?—If the prices are fixed by the manufacturer himself it applies as if it were the P.A.T.A. If the manufacturer fixes the price himself he cannot have any objection to the worker fixing the price of his commodity.

14. Then, you are taking exception to his power as a manufacturer to say at what price his goods should be sold?—Yes. I submit that no set of individuals in any well-governed country should be allowed to have the power to say that my commodity must be sold, but that his will not be supplied to anybody. In other words, if a worker withholds his services he is fined or kept in gaol for it, but the manufacturer, under your proposals, could refuse to supply his goods.