

Just recently similar regulations have been gazetted in North Canterbury affecting Christchurch and the surrounding districts. A similar margin of profit has been fixed in that case, and similar wage conditions have been voluntarily undertaken by the service-station proprietors and most of the garages.

Representation for the fixing of the price of motor-spirits in other areas are at the present time under investigation by the Department, and there has been a very definite desire for fixation due to the price-cutting tactics employed by certain of the competitors in those areas where price-fixing has been asked for. Each case is thoroughly investigated on its merits, and it is anticipated that the general principle will be extended to other areas in the near future.

The fixing of the prices has been very well received by all sections of the petrol-selling industry, and has benefited wholesaler and retailer alike, while the employees of those engaged in the industry have received higher wages and better working-conditions.

GAS REGULATIONS.

The Board of Trade (Gas) Regulations administered by the Department are designed to provide protection in respect of calorific value, purity, pressure, measurement and price.

All the large undertakings, both private and municipal, have been brought within the scope of the regulations, and the number now covered by them is nineteen. At the present time, upon the recommendation of the Chief Gas Referee, an investigation is proceeding in connection with the bringing of the Sumner Gasworks under the provisions of the regulations.

The work of the Gas Examiners and Inspector of Meters has been carried out efficiently during the year, and official relations with the gas companies and municipal undertakings have, without exception, continued to remain most satisfactory.

COMMERCIAL TRUSTS ACT, 1910.

The Commercial Trusts Act is designed with a view toward preventing the giving of concessions, &c., in consideration of exclusive dealing, and also to prevent sales at unreasonably high prices which have been fixed or influenced in any way by a commercial trust. Provision is also made in the Act to prevent refusals to deal, if such refusals arise for certain reasons, and also provision is made to deal with monopolies which are of such a nature as to be contrary to public interest.

Quite a number of complaints have been made to the Department during the past year that certain of the provisions of the Act have been infringed. These complaints have mostly concerned alleged refusals to supply certain commodities and to alleged price-fixing of commodities that are covered by the provisions of the Act.

Each case that has come before the Department has been thoroughly investigated, and the nature and relative circumstances in each instance carefully examined. In no instances, however, during the past year did the evidence collected show that the case under investigation was one for prosecution.

The Commercial Trusts Act serves as a very useful deterrent against unfair trading practices, and is necessary as a safeguard to the public and to the business men. Its importance lies, perhaps, not so much in its enforcement through the Courts, but in its restraining influence.

CHATELS TRANSFER ACT, 1924.

The Department has charge of the administration of section 57 of the Chattels Transfer Act, 1924, which provides for the protection of bailors of such chattels as are referred to in the Seventh Schedule to the Act without the necessity of the registration of the agreement concerned. Provision is also made to enable Orders in Council to be gazetted extending the Seventh Schedule by the addition of further classes of chattels recognized as being the subject of "customary hire-purchase agreements."

Applications are from time to time received for the extension of the Schedule to include further classes of chattels, and thorough investigations are made in each of the four centres of the Dominion as to the customary trade practice adopted in the disposal of these chattels, and as to the desirability or otherwise of adding such chattels to the Seventh Schedule. During the past year application was received for the inclusion of electro-plated spoons and forks and cutlery to the Seventh Schedule, but the evidence obtained in connection with the application disclosed that there was not sufficient justification to warrant their addition to the Schedule.

At the present time the Government has under definite consideration an amendment to the Chattels Transfer Act which is designed to overcome a weakness whereby vendors of chattels are able to make a profit out of the default of the hirers. Cases have been brought to the notice of the Government where unscrupulous dealers have made considerable profits on the repossession and sale of chattels on which the hirer has paid a considerable amount owing. The contemplated amendment is providing for the protection of the hirer and intends to give him the right to establish his equity in the chattels in the only possible way—that is, by endeavouring to sell them himself, and, after accounting to the vendor for the amount due to him, to retain the balance. Certain reputable dealers who effect a considerable amount of business by hire purchase consider that such protection is justified, and, in fact, point out that in many cases such a practice is observed by them, although no such provision is necessary under the Act as it at present stands.