

But it appears that the very fact that profits are under control makes the arrangement more or less obnoxious to traders. There is reason to believe that the manufacturers do not object to this price-control—in fact, many of them welcome it as a change from the uncertainty that now pervades their whole business—but the shopkeeper naturally pushes the sale of the goods on which he gets the best margin of profit. If, however, there were a widespread public demand for the standardized footwear the trader would be obliged to stock the boots.

MEAT.

Through the medium of the price-investigation tribunals and the Department's investigating officers a considerable amount of attention has been given to the supervision of meat-prices. The New Zealand *per capita* consumption of meat is comparatively high, and therefore the slightest reduction in the retail prices of this commodity means an enormous saving to the public. The Department recognizes, however, that the established butchers have maintained a high standard of sanitation, and that they are entitled to a reasonable profit for the services rendered. This is one of the reasons why the fall in the retail prices of meat is not so great as the fall in stock-values. As the market conditions change the Department will endeavour to ensure that no unjustifiable increase is made in the retail prices of meat.

FISH.

It is a matter of considerable difficulty to calculate fair prices for supplies of fish. It will be remembered that the fishing industry in the Auckland District was investigated in 1918–19, and a separate report issued under section 6 of the Cost of Living Act. Since that report was published the position of affairs in Dunedin has been subject to detailed inquiry by the price-investigation tribunal, and a full report of the evidence has been submitted to the Press. The Wellington Price-investigation Tribunal also submitted a report on the fishing industry in the Wellington District.

PETROL-SUPPLIES.

The regulations introduced in July, 1918, for the fixation of prices and the distribution of petrol were suspended, in so far as quantity was concerned, during a portion of the period of 1919, but in December of that year it was feared that the position would again become acute, and arrangements were immediately made to again enforce the regulations. Early in March, 1920, the position, owing to the reduced supplies coming forward from the United States, became very acute, and a central petrol committee was set up in Wellington, with sub-committees at each of the main ports, to co-operate with the Board of Trade. It was found necessary to ration supplies and in some cases to suspend supplies altogether, except in the cases of essential industries. It was estimated that the Dominion's annual requirements were fourteen million gallons; and notwithstanding the fact that between the months of January and May, 1920, the petrol imports into the Dominion showed an approximate increase of one and a half million gallons, the shortage continued. At this time the price for petrol in the United Kingdom was 3s. 8½d. per gallon, against an average price of 4s. 2d. per gallon in New Zealand.

With the assistance of the central and local petrol committees the control by the Board continued until September, 1920, when it was found that supplies were coming forward freely and justified the Board's decision to permit wholesale and retail suppliers, who had been allowed to stock up to four weeks' requirements only, to hold petrol in any quantity provided the selling-price did not exceed that gazetted.

For an unaccountable reason shipments in November and December, 1920, came forward in exceedingly large quantities, and the subsequent returns from importers showed that over one and a half million cases of petrol actually arrived in the Dominion by the end of the following February, and all anxiety as to supplies was removed. Since early this year there have been ample supplies available to meet all demands, and the prices of all oils, illuminating and power, have shown a declining tendency. In view of the keen competition to effect sales the Board removed the restrictions on price in June of this year.

Judging by the correspondence received by the Department, the work of the various petrol committees gave general satisfaction to the importer, distributor, and consumer. The Department takes this opportunity of publicly thanking the members of the various committees, and the oil-importing firms generally, for valuable honorary services rendered during a most critical period.

COAL.

On many occasions during the past two years the supply of coal has been seriously jeopardized by production and transport difficulties, but recently there has undoubtedly been an improvement in the supplies, especially in the South Island. Much of the coal for industrial purposes has been imported at heavy cost, and this has hampered local manufacturers. A close watch has been kept on coal-prices by the Department to ensure the consumer getting it at a reasonable price. The Department has nothing to add to the information and recommendations contained in the Board of Trade report on the coal-mining industry.

WOOL.

The difficulties arising in connection with the wool-market have been closely followed by the Department, although the administrative measures connected with this trade come within the province of another Department. The development of our woollen-manufactures was attended with great