

261. *Mr. Ell.*] With respect to the supply of New Zealand timber for milling purposes to which Mr. Barber referred, the report of 1906-7 says that, as a result of systematic inquiries made by the various Commissioners of Crown Lands, timber experts, and Crown Lands Rangers belonging to the Department of Lands, they have been able to supply certain information: do you not think they are now in a better position to judge—seeing that they made a survey and investigation—than the late Mr. Kirk could possibly be in?—Yes, I think so.

262. So that the information obtained by the Lands Department is more reliable than the report of Mr. Kirk?—I should certainly think so.

263. It covers the quantities of milling-timber on private and Native land and Crown land in New Zealand, and they say it will not last more than seventy years at the outside from the year 1907. Do you think we should be justified in accepting that as fairly reliable?—Yes, I think so: that is the best way we can get at it.

264. The report further states that in Taranaki and Hawke's Bay the mills have gone out of work, and that they are diminishing in this district?—I do not think the mills are.

265. According to the report they are?—I do not think they take into account the mills on private property.

266. Yes, the report says so. I should like to know whether you think it advisable that the export of timber should be limited, seeing that we are dependent on the outside world for our timber-supply?—It is such an immense question. It is too big a question, and I should have to consider it well, and I have not sufficient data to go upon, and I do not know the conditions prevailing. I know exactly what you mean, and quite recognise it.

267. The whole point is whether we should preserve a supply for our local needs?—I should certainly say not if we can produce it at anything like as cheap as we can import it.

268. *Mr. Arnold.*] Of course, you know that this Commission has been set up in consequence of the unsatisfactory condition of the timber industry at the present time?—I do.

269. You recognise that the condition is very unsatisfactory?—Yes.

270. Especially from a milling point of view?—Yes, and from the merchant's point of view also.

271. We have had evidence to show that the millers are paying a higher wage than that set out in the arbitration award?—That is so, absolutely.

272. So that you do not suggest that any improvement can be made by a reduction of wages?—I do not suggest that.

273. And neither do you suggest, I think, an increased import duty: you do not think that would remedy the conditions?—As a sawmiller it would perhaps benefit me; but I am looking at it in a more liberal light.

274. But that would relieve the conditions to some extent?—It would somewhat, because I know they must be suffering on the West Coast. If they suffer there it will inevitably react here, and we must suffer. We shall have more men coming from the West Coast to this district.

275. Do you think it would be possible for the Government to relieve the position by offering a bonus on the production of timber—giving the sawmillers a bonus on so-many thousand feet?—I could not say at all.

276. Would you suggest that?—No. That is an idea that has never occurred to me, and I could not say.

277. I understand you to say that you do not think it possible to increase the price of timber for many years?—I do not think we shall get an increase for many years.

278. So that from your evidence I gather that you think the position might be relieved slightly by a duty, and that, if the area of 800 acres per mill was increased, that also would be something towards it?—Certainly.

279. Now, as a practical miller and as a practical timber-merchant and expert in every way, have you any other suggestion you can give this Commission which will enable them to come to some decision for the purpose of relieving the present position?—I think the present position is almost entirely due to the depression. I think that is 95 per cent. of the whole trouble.

280. The Commission cannot relieve the depression?—No.

281. And you have no other suggestion?—No.

282. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] You told us that the cost of production was 8s. 1½d. ?—Yes.

283. And that a fair selling-price would be 11s. ?—Yes.

284. Yet I understand that you are selling timber in Ashburton at 6s. 6d. ?—Yes; that is ordinary building-timber.

285. It refers to the same timber which costs you 8s. 1½d. ?—8s. 1½d. is the average price of all sorts of timber.

286. Is not 6s. 6d. the average price, too?—No, that is for big lines—not for dressed timber or totara.

287. It pays you to sell in Ashburton at 6s. 6d. ?—We do; but there is not much in the 6s. 6d. We are selling some at Timaru at less than that—at 4s. 6d., and so on. It is a very difficult thing, and seems very confusing. There are so many descriptions of timber; but that is one of our big lines—the ordinary inch timber.

288. I think you said that you did not consider the wages too high, or that the wages now being paid were harassing the industry in any way?—I do not think they are harassing the industry. Good men always deserve their money.

289. You gave us a statement in reference to the wages in America being very low?—Yes.

290. You agree that if you employ the cheap labour—the Orientals—you have to employ more of them to get the same amount of work?—Yes, and I do not advise it.

291. So that the low wage is really not a low wage?—Yes,