

32. Can you speak as to the other items as apart from the mere building of the structure—ironmongers' charges—nails, and so forth?—In some lines—in fact, I think most have gone up, but not to the same extent as the timber.

33. Sashes and doors?—They have gone up; they are affected by the timber-rise.

34. What has been the increase?—I could not state the difference in regard to those.

35. Can you state the difference in regard to iron?—Not at the present time. I do not think there would be much difference on what it used to be.

36. Have there been substantial increases made in wages by the Arbitration Court during the last ten years?—Only 1s. per day, so far as we are concerned.

37. In your opinion, was that increase warrantable?—Well, I dare say it is a fair wage; but the question arises that those who are employing men are handicapped to a certain extent: two or three workers go together and tender for a job—it was done by some of those who had been agitating for the award—and employ no labour. Of course, they had an advantage over those under the award, because they were not bound by the award. So far as their own time was concerned, they could work harder and for longer hours, and probably not get any more than we had to pay a man working less time.

38. Has the effect of the award been to make better tradesmen?—I do not think so.

39. Has it had the opposite effect?—It has, so far as I know.

40. *Mr. Arnold.*] If you are going to open up that question, we must have evidence from the employees cited. I do not know how far you are going to extend that.

*Hon. the Chairman.* I think we shall have to go into the prices.

*Mr. Arnold.* I shall have to call the evidence of some of the men.

*Witness.* So far as labour in the cost of production is concerned, I think, so far as my memory serves me, twenty or twenty-two years ago the whole cost of production put on the trucks, let by contract, would be about 2s. 2d. Trollying and all was included. No doubt, if you ask some of the sawmill employees' witnesses, when they are here, they may be able to give you that information.

41. *Mr. Field.*] Covering everything?—The mill that was referred to to-day was four miles distant.

42. *Mr. Hanan.*] But twenty miles from here to where they are cutting?—That is so.

43. Can you give us in the order of importance the causes to which you attribute the increased cost of building in Invercargill or Southland? First, you take the increase in the price of timber?—That has increased very largely.

44. Would that be the main factor?—Yes, that was the first combination that started here.

45. What do we understand by "combination"?—Well, the association.

46. Did increase the price?—Well, the price has gradually raised since the association was formed in 1907. There had been an association in existence a good many years before that, and it was through the formation of that association that the timber rose from 5s. and 6s. per 100 ft. to 10s. 6d. Of course, I believe that at that time there was a bit of a split on, and it was re-formed; and, I suppose, that is the reason why they made a statement that it was formed in 1907. They had a combination before that, and a price agreed, but some of them used certain ways of selling under the price at certain times. At that time some of them found a difference, and there was a split. I remember one particular instance: there was a church job; a company was going to tender for it, and, of course, the sawmillers were working to get the order. The church people were keen to get a donation, and the millers, I believe, told them that they could not give them a reduction, but if they were satisfied that the timber ought to be taken from them that they would give them a good donation. That was one way of getting out of it, and I believe that was the means of breaking up the combination. But they found it a matter of mutual advantage to agree again, and then they rose the timber again.

47. Do you say that the price of timber is too high?—I think it is, personally.

48. Having regard to the rates payable now—having regard to rents, cost of living, and other factors, do you think the cost of building is too high in Invercargill to-day?—Well, if you go into the ordinary building of a cottage here for the purpose of letting, I am satisfied that it would not pay. I have a few cottages myself, but then, of course, I do not build them in the ordinary way that the general public would.

49. What do you mean by quoting in the ordinary way?—I mean employing an architect, getting plans drawn, &c. Of course, what I mean by myself is that I very often have odd lines which I cannot use up in any other way, but even then I can assure you it takes me all my time to make them pay. I have close on a dozen cottages, and to get 7 per cent. out of the buildings, and to pay rates and insurance out of that, I do not think there is much in it for anybody.

50. You have taken the increase of price, first of all, as a main factor: what is the next?—Well, bricks are a little dearer, and the other materials also—lime, and so forth—all have gone up.

51. Where would you put wages? Would you regard that as a small factor?—As a matter of fact, so far as building operations are concerned, working it out at per hundred, you can get very little more now than ten or twenty years ago.

52. *Mr. Jennings.*] Is it fair to contrast the present position, so far as building is concerned, with what existed in 1889 when there was a great depression all over the colony?—I am not contrasting it.

53. You gave us the price in 1889?—Well, I consider about that time. It may have been before that time or after; it was probably before and after.

54. Was there much building going on at all in the year you quote?—More than now—as much any way; I could get more, at all events.

55. That was the time of the exodus?—I know that.

56. There is a Builders' Association here? What is its object?—Well, the principal object of forming it was, of course, to defend the trade in the Arbitration Court when the award was fixed. That was really the reason why it was formed.