

in our own country. If we import it with a small duty and they have an inexhaustible supply, which we are told they have, and they can bring it here as cheap as we can from Orepuki, well, the question is where it is going to end. We have five or six thousand men employed in the industry here, and if that inexhaustible supply is coming in here, it may be a very serious thing for the men employed in the business, unless it can be shown that the country really requires it and cannot do without it, and I do not think we have reached that stage yet.

25. You said you were speaking as an individual sawmiller: now let us have your opinion from a national standpoint?—I put it this way: I am a Free-trader by conviction, and I think I am not at all inconsistent when I say that the Government ought to consider us a little in this matter just now; and I will tell you why. The increase in the cost of production has been caused a great deal by the increase in wages, the restrictions in regard to the carrying-on of our work, double royalty, and so on, and it seems to me that, if the Government passes these laws and restrictions, and increases the cost in various ways, even as a Free-trader I could not be charged with inconsistency very much if I said you have considered one side and we are entitled to consideration too.

26. What percentage of the increase that has taken place do the wages bear to the increase in prices during the last ten years? I take it you have considered that question in coming to your conclusion?—No, I have not thought that out. I know there is a large increase. We were paying 8s. to men twelve years ago, and we are now paying 12s. and 13s.

27. To what class of men do you pay the 13s?—To the sawyers.

28. What is the average increase in the wages of the men?—It must be at least 20 per cent.

29. What is the average increase as regards the price of timber?—Nine years ago timber was selling here at 8s. 6d., and it is now 10s. 6d., less 5 per cent.

30. Do I understand from you that the increase in wages has been the chief factor in contributing towards the increase in the price of timber, or a small factor?—It is a considerable factor, but I would not like to say it is the chief factor.

31. What do you say is the main factor?—Of course, there is no doubt at all that eight or nine years ago 80 or 85 per cent. of the sawmilling was carried on in flat country with good and easily worked bush, as compared nowadays with 80 per cent. of the sawmilling being carried on in hilly country.

32. Am I right in saying that the main factor has been the cost of production as regards the working hilly country?—Yes, of course.

33. Is it not a fact that two-thirds of the mills in this district are working in the Longwood district?—More than two-thirds in the hilly country.

34. Can you give me the cost of labour for producing 100 ft. in the Seaward Bush as compared with the cost of producing the same quantity in the Longwood Bush?—The lowest price is in the Seaward Bush, and the highest price in the higher country. Of course, you must bear in mind the fact that it is not only the hilly country, but the bush is better.

35. What is the quantity of red-pine in the Seaward Bush as compared with that in Longwood?—There were large tracts in the Seaward Bush.

36. Am I right in putting down the Seaward Bush at 90 per cent. red-pine and Longwood at 50 per cent.?—I do not think you are far out. In the Seaward Bush there is about 85 per cent.

37. And Longwood?—It is very hard to say. The bush does very well in hilly country—you get large tracts, and in flat country it is practically the same all over. You come to one patch in hilly country where there are great tracts of one class of timber, and perhaps half a mile away you find a different kind. My own experience has been that at least 60 or 65 per cent. is red-pine.

38. Am I right in saying that the class of bush worked now is inferior to the class worked ten years ago?—Yes, infinitely—no comparison.

39. As regards wages, I understand there is a difficulty in getting men in Southland: that is the reason they are paying higher wages?—There has been up to perhaps now.

40. Are you a member of the association?—Yes.

41. Suppose that the association were broken up, would it follow that, with the cut-throat competition which would ensue, the mills would have to shut up?—I should say it would be certain to have that effect on some of the mills.

42. Which is your most profitable market?—Dunedin is our best market.

43. Is it a better market than Invercargill?—Yes.

44. How many mills are working in Longwood?—I am not quite sure—I think sixty or sixty-seven altogether, but I do not remember for certain.

45. How many mills have you?—Two.

46. Where is your bush?—At Oraki, beyond Riverton, and another at One-tree Point, thirty miles away.

47. I think you were with McCallum and Co.?—Yes, I was with them thirty years ago.

48. What was the location of the mills thirty-five years ago?—The bulk of them were in the Seaward Bush then. There was one at Woodlands and one of McCallum's at Longbush, and working right round the edge of the bush was another big mill.

49. Now what distance, generally speaking, would the mills be from Invercargill on an average, say, twenty-five years ago?—Eleven miles from Woodlands.

50. To-day how many miles back?—Mine is one of the closest, thirty-one miles.

51. So that you would say the bush has gone back during the last twenty-five years—how many miles?—Four time the distance.

52. If it has gone back in that time, does it not stand to reason that with less bush they will go back further in another twenty-five years' time?—They are bound to.

53. Does not that mean an increase in the price of timber?—I should expect that certainly.

54. Because it is further away, and more difficult, and the bush is not so good?—The bush is more sparse, and inferior in quality generally. In fact, we have no bush at all now like the Seaward Bush.