

141. They sell for the best price they can get?—Yes, and even where they supply the larger sawmillers they also supply outsiders.

142. So that the public are not being injured by the combination at all?—Oh, no!

143. *Mr. Barber.*] You say you are a member of the association?—Yes.

144. How long has it been in existence?—I think about sixteen years.

145. We were told that the association was only formed in 1907?—In a sense, it was a reconstruction. That was it.

146. There was an original association previous to the present one?—Yes.

147. So that the statement as to the rise of prices during the existence of the association only applies to the new association, or does it apply to the old association?—I could not say what they meant when they made their statements.

148. You say there are some millers in the association who contract for the whole output of the small mills?—There have been.

149. You say that, although they had a contract to supply the large miller, yet they sold to private individuals?—I am not saying that they do it now; but it has been a fairly common practice in the past.

150. That reduces the number in competition outside the association?—Yes, if they go and sell it. It has been done.

151. With regard to the 22,500 ft. you supplied for £123, where did you supply it?—In Invercargill on the job.

152. Some years ago you say the cost of milling timber was 8½d.?—That is for the bare work in the mill only.

153. How much does it cost to-day?—It is hard to say. I suppose it will cost something like 1s. 2d. or 1s. 3d.

154. What is the reason for the increased cost in the mill?—That is a question which is hard to answer. There is no doubt that increased wages is a large item, and there is no mincing matters that we do not get the same return from a man that we used to get.

155. Wages have gone up 100 per cent. then in a mill?—How?

156. From 8½d. to 1s. 2d. there is an increase of 5½d.—75 per cent., at all events?—I did not say simply on the wages paid.

157. You do not mean to tell me that the machinery is obsolete?—No, it has improved.

158. What else in the mill adds to the charges?—First of all, we pay a man higher wages for his time, and he takes longer to do the job.

159. Do you mean to tell me that with the improved machinery in the last twenty years the cost of production has gone up from 8½d. to 1s. 2d.?—No, but at that time we were working on tip-top bush.

160. That does not make any difference when you have got your logs at the mill?—I beg your pardon, it does very much—you have easier-cut timber and less slabs.

161. The cost was 8½d. twenty years ago. I want to see whether the workers are getting any advantage out of the increased cost?—I think I have answered you fairly well—that the wages have increased, but men take longer to do the work, and that the bush is not so good.

162. You say you are paying something like 14s. 6d. to a man in wages?—I said 8s. to 12s. and 14s.

163. Will you produce your wages-book?—I did not say that I was paying 14s., but that some millers are paying that; I am paying 12s.

164. With regard to the importation of Oregon pine which you say will be detrimental to the sawmillers, do you know the wharfage on Oregon pine at the Bluff?—No.

165. Are you aware that the railage from there is 1s. 11d.?—I know that.

166. Then there is 2s. duty, so that without any wharfage at all you have an advantage of 4s.?—We have not got any advantage. We have to pay freight to here, as well as they do, from the Bluff.

167. But the freight you pay is not 1s. 11d.?—It is 2s. 3d. or 2s. 4d.

168. Do you not think that the 4s. is ample protection without anything further?—There is no 4s. protection at all, because we pay more than that.

169. If you want to have the total cost, you want to add steamer or sailing freight, which is over 2s. 6d. Add that to the cost of wharfage and railage, and do you think it is right that a further levy should be imposed on those compelled to purchase timber—because it is a levy?—It is a levy in protecting highly priced artisans and workers.

170. You said you were a Free-trader by conviction, but a Protectionist when it comes to yourself?—I did not put it exactly that way, but it amounts to that pretty well.

171. With regard to the cost, when it only cost 8½d. what was the price of timber?—I think it was put on the trucks at 4s. 6d.

172. The total cost, I understood you to say, was 2s. 4d. for production?—No, there is horse-feed, &c., to be added to that. I gave the bare cost of labour in the bush, mill, and yard.

173. Do you know that it was put on the trucks for 4s. 6d.?—I know it was about that time.

174. So that there has been a gradual rise in prices up to the present day?—Yes.

175. You say Dunedin is your best mark, and that one reason for the increase is that the mills have gone back, on an average, about twenty miles further from the time you mention. Do you know that the cost of delivering timber is cheaper now although you bring it twenty miles further—that there is no extra cartage?—Of course, that only refers to Dunedin.

176. It refers to your best market?—But that is not the only market.

177. Take the price for delivering in Invercargill, does it not fall on the sawmiller on account of the concessions he has got?—I cannot follow that if the minimum charge was 8d. per hundred and now is 1s. 6d. or 2s.