

106. But where labour is scarce you cannot always get competent hands, and since you are compelled to employ incompetent as well as competent hands, an employer would not be able to turn them off so rapidly?—You are not compelled to pay incompetent the same as competent hands. If a man is physically unfit or old he gets a permit to work at a reduced wage.

107. But employers usually do not care to pronounce a man incompetent?—Of course, you can get a man who may think he is a very good man, and not be.

108. Do you think there is any probability of Oregon, if it is introduced here in large quantities, reducing the price of timber?—I do not think it will reduce the price of timber much.

109. What would be the advantage of letting it in here in large quantities if it did not reduce the price for the working-man?—If it came in large quantities we should have men out of work.

110. Would it not be an injury without any practical benefit?—Yes, that is so.

111. *Mr. Field.*] You said you thought it would be a good thing for the State to erect saw-mills, and so fix the price for timber. Do you not think, if the offer has been made—and it has, by the millers of the North Island and the west coast of the South Island—to put their books into the hands of the Government and mill at its price—do you not think that is a fair offer?—Yes, I think that would be very fair. I was in Wellington when they offered that.

112. *Hon. the Chairman.*] With your knowledge, do you think the Government is competent to fix what would be a fair price to apply to Southland, Westland, and the North Island?—There may be some trouble as far as that is concerned.

113. I see here that in your evidence some time back before the Arbitration Court you stated “Timber had advanced 4s. 6d. since 1896”?—Yes.

114. Do you still believe that that is so?—That is according to the price-list. Of course, there may be discounts, &c., afterwards. I have old accounts here.

115. But the increase of wages you stated only amounted to 4d. per hundred feet?—Yes.

116. So that the worker only got 4d., in other words, out of this 4s. 6d.?—That is so.

117. You still believe that is so?—Yes.

JAMES PERCY RIDINGS sworn and examined. (No. 16.)

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] We wish you to give the Commission some evidence as to the quantity of timber passing through the Customs?—Well, I have some returns here supplied to the Head Office some time ago when the question of Oregon pine was under consideration. The returns are made up to the 31st August, and I have the returns for the years 1904 to 1908, the quantities, values, and duties.

2. *Mr. Hanan.*] Is that for timber arriving at the Bluff?—Yes, simply at the Bluff. I produce a return of timber imported from the 1st July, 1908, to the 28th February, 1909 [put in, marked “Exhibit A”]; also a return of imports of Oregon timber for the years ended 31st August, 1904 to 1908 [put in, marked “Exhibit B”]; a return of imports of foreign timber during the years ended 30th June, 1907 and 1908, including sleepers [put in, and marked “Exhibit C”]; returns of timbers imported and duty collected thereon, during the years ended 30th June, 1907 and 1908, and returns of sleepers for same period [put in, and marked “Exhibit D”]; returns of foreign timbers imported for year ended 30th June, 1907 and 1908, not including Australian timber [put in, and marked “Exhibit E”]

3. *Mr. Barber.*] What are the wharfage charges on timber at the Bluff?—I could not tell you. I heard the last witness say that the duty on doors was 2s. apiece, but that is not correct—the duty is 20 per cent., and foreign manufacture 10 per cent. additional, making 30 per cent.

WILLIAM ROY RIDDELL, Smith's Factory, Invercargill, sworn and examined. (No. 17.)

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] You are one of the proprietors?—Yes.

2. Can you give any evidence with regard to the timber-work in the factory?—I do not know exactly what evidence I could give. I certainly have been at it now for twenty years, and I ought to be able to give some idea of it, but I do not know exactly what is wanted. I would be willing to answer any questions.

3. We want to get evidence as to the prices at which you sell to the middleman and to the consumer and the retailer. Can you give us any evidence of that?—The price as sold to the middleman? I suppose that it would be considered that the firm I am connected with would be the middleman. We have a sawmill also of our own, but have purchased largely in the last ten years. So far as the price goes, it certainly has risen a good deal, but the timber is much more difficult to procure. Ten years ago we used to buy timber here, for what costs us now 10s. 6d. less 5 per cent., at a cost of 6s. 9d. At that time we used to purchase the greater part of our supplies from the Seaward Bush, which was a very good bush, the best in this neighbourhood, and the good trees were standing close together like wheat, and you could go into an acre of ground and hew them down, which, of course, made the production cheap. As it is now, the sawmill we are interested in is close on fifty miles from here: you have to go that far back before you can procure bush. The timber there is of a different class altogether; the trees are short, and a long distance between them with a lot of inferior timber in between. Some of it is useful and some of no use, and it has got to be left standing. The consequence is that the price of good timber must rise. On account of the long distance, you have to face that. It costs us railage at the present time 2s. 3d. per hundred feet.

4. What was the railage before?—There was none before: it was delivered right into our yards. We had it growing in our back yard, as it were, and it only cost about 4d. to deliver it in town. We put no siding into our place because it would not pay us.