

our local industry requires some protection, but I would not be inclined to shut out timber which we find to be so useful as Oregon.

71. Referring to the price paid for our own timber, do you not think that, if the timber-yards can buy our ordinary building-timber at 6s. 6d., they might reduce their price?—Yes, there seems a pretty fair margin between 6s. 6d. and the rates we pay here.

72. Have you heard of their buying it for 6s. 6d.?—I cannot say I have. I have seen the bush price-lists published by the bush sawmills, but I do not think the mills would sell to a builder at the same rate as to a timber-merchant who is taking perhaps the whole output.

73. But you agree that if they could do it at that they would make a very handsome profit?—Yes.

74. Are you aware of the conditions existing twenty years ago?—Yes.

75. You say the timber was very much cheaper then?—Yes, very much.

76. Have you any knowledge of the fact as stated by Mr. Massey that some of the sawmillers had become bankrupt owing to the low price at that time?—I quite believe that.

77. Supposing you saw receipts for timber at a very low price, would you regard that as conclusive evidence that that was the local price of the timber at that time?—It might be a specially low quotation under special circumstances. If it was very cheap I should be inclined to think there were some special circumstances.

78. *Mr. Leyland.*] I should like you to give me the address of those imported counters?—Mr. J. R. McKenzie, in Wardell's Buildings, George Street, Dunedin.

79. Do you think the duty on Oregon should be increased?—No, I think it should not.

80. Do you think it should be decreased?—Yes, I think it should be decreased. In the large sizes I think it should be brought in without any duty at all; but at all events I should be against increasing it.

81. So far as the large sizes are concerned, you would be in favour of abolishing the duty?—Yes.

82. You stated that the timber-merchant buys at 6s. 6d. and sells at 13s. 6d., less 12½ per cent. for cash?—Yes.

83. That is 1s. 8d., and that leaves 11s. 4d. for the timber-merchant?—Yes.

84. He does not get it for 6s. 6d., because the transit charges and wharfage are equal to 2s. 9d.?—Yes.

85. He has to take it to his yard, and has rents, rates, and taxes to pay; insurance, both accident and fire; and he has the trade risks and the bad debts?—Yes.

86. When you have deducted all that, do you think he had a very exorbitant profit?—No.

87. As a matter of fact, the timber-merchant does not buy at 6s. 6d.—it is only at some distant point?—Yes.

88. *Mr. Clarke.*] With regard to the alleged controlling of prices, I think you heard a witness state that it cost him the same wholesale rates wherever he bought timber?—Yes.

89. And you have also yourself stated that you have to pay the same retail price wherever you buy it?—Yes.

90. Whether you call that a combination or a ring, would it make much difference?—I would not like to explain the difference.

91. It is merely ringing the changes?—There seems to be a general understanding that there is a fixed price, and we find we have to pay those prices wherever we go.

92. If you as a builder started to cut your timber up and run it into mouldings and sell it below the fixed scale, what would you expect to happen—would you expect to get a request to please explain?—I should expect to find some remonstrances coming along before very long.

93. *Mr. Morris.*] Is the increased cost of building to-day not due more to the improved style of the building than to the cost of the material used?—Yes, I dare say that is a fact. That has an influence on the increased cost undoubtedly.

94. You mentioned the fact that you preferred the Oregon because you got it seasoned?—Yes.

95. Is it a very material advantage to have the long tie-beams, 30 ft. or 40 ft., seasoned? You say you cannot get them in local timber?—Yes, there are advantages, of course. Take rimu, for instance, and big beams: if you use paint and cover them in, that means the life of the timber for only two or three years. I know an instance in this town where rimu has been cased in, and in the course of two or three years it has been so bad with dry-rot that you could tear it out with your hands. It is an improvement to have these large beams very well seasoned, or to allow a free access of air to get at them.

96. As a rule, in large buildings, they do not get covered up very quickly?—No, it may be several months; but if you get a 12 in. by 4 in. beam, you do not get the sap out of that timber in six months.

97. You said you would be in favour of abolishing the duty in long lengths and large sizes of Oregon?—Yes.

98. Do you not think that would tend to let it come into the country and be recut?—Yes, it would have a tendency that way. Of course, a certain amount of recutting goes on in any case.

99. *Mr. Barber.*] You said an increase in building-material would affect speculative building?—Yes, to some extent.

100. How far would that affect the employment of tradesmen concerned in the erection of a building—not only the carpenter, but the bricklayer, plumber, and paperhanger, &c.?—Of course, it would affect them to some extent detrimentally, but it is rather hard to say offhand the exact extent.

101. If speculative building was to stand still there would be a scarcity of work?—Yes.