

with regard to the duty on small Oregon that I fail to see the object of that. What is the use of carting sawdust here, and how can you prevent a sawmiller from converting it into small stuff when he gets it here? It only costs about 1s. per hundred to convert it into small stuff. If I get it in very large sizes it prevents me from using it. For those reasons I do not see why there should be any distinction made. A builder or anybody else has a better idea from the small timber that is cut than from what is in junks. Very often when it is cut up there is a knot in it that spoils the whole thing. In small timber you can see that. I have not said anything about Oregon, but I agree with the statement put in by the Builders' Association, and I think that to restrict the importation of Oregon would be a mistake. It would be to the advantage of the colony if we were to go slowly in the matter of cutting up native bush. Kauri fills a place in our trade which it would be very hard to replace. In ordinary household work kauri is invaluable as a timber—the best that I have met. The popular opinion is that the rise in timber is mostly responsible for the increased cost of buildings, whereas the cost of labour has more to do with it than the timber, and so far as work in the City of Dunedin is concerned the sanitary work has increased about fourfold. We have to do the plumbing and drainage work for a four-roomed wooden cottage just as well as the highest class of brick building, which could easily be shown to be unreasonable.

FRANCIS WILKINSON, Builder and Contractor, sworn and examined. (No. 32.)

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] Can you give us any information that will aid this inquiry?—From the Builders' Association you have already got pretty good ideas of the ideas of the members of that association. I do not think it will be necessary for me to enter into any long statement. You have had a good deal of evidence which covers anything I have to say, but I am prepared to answer any questions that may be put to me.

2. Can you give us any information with regard to the price of timber during the last ten years?—There has been a rise in rough timber of from 2s. to 3s. within the last two or three years alone.

3. Has that had any deterrent effect on the industry?—I do not think so; people always want something cheap, and no matter how cheap it is most people want a gold watch for a cabbage. I have had in my experience fifteen or sixteen years ago when timber was down to about 7s. 6d., that no matter what the cost of the timber is they will always want to get it cheaper. Timber will never be cheaper; there is going to be a shortage throughout the world. In a few years' time when we are all dead there will not be sufficient timber. I do not think the price has had any effect on the building industry here. I think the greatest effect has been that land has been too dear.

4. Could you tell the Commission any way by which they could prevent this dearness in land?—Well, I am not prepared to enter into politics just at the present time.

5. Do you use very much of this timber in your business?—I have not a very large business. I am a small builder, but have a fairly good turnover. During the last year I must have handled in the way of timber close on 90,000 ft.

6. Do you stock the timber?—I do not.

7. Give the orders as they come in?—Yes.

8. Do you feel any difference in orders between the associated millers and those outside?—None whatever.

9. What is the ruling price that you generally get now?—Rough timber 13s. 6d., with the usual discount. Of course, if I buy it direct from the south it is 9s. 6d., the southern price, and you have to add railage to that, with discount off the timber-price.

10. What would it save you?—About 1s. per hundred feet getting it direct. You save the yarding charges, but I can get it out of the yard at the Southland price—in fact, we do that now. The public get the benefit of the discounts all the time.

11. *Mr. Arnold.*] That is caused by competition?—Yes.

12. How many builders are there in Dunedin?—I cannot say.

13. About how many?—About three hundred.

14. How many in the association?—Eighty-five.

15. Less than one-third?—Yes.

16. Can you give me any reason why the remainder do not join?—I cannot, I am sure.

17. You do not take any steps to persuade them to come in?—No.

18. Why was your association called into existence?—To keep in touch with the laws of the land as they are going on, alterations to building by-laws, labour laws, to keep an eye on the Government, and all that sort of thing.

19. Of course, there is considerable expense attached to the association?—No, there is not.

20. You exist for self-protection?—The same as every other trade-union exists.

21. Do you not think it very unfair that these other people should remain outside it?—I do, because the Builders' Association is really a patriotic association; they sacrifice a good deal of time for the good of the community at large.

22. Especially the building community?—And the guiding of public bodies, like our own City Council here.

23. While your association exists for self-protection it does not in any way preclude competition between its members?—No.

24. It is unlike the Millers' Association as far as that is concerned?—Competition is very keen.

25. Just as keen among the members as those outside?—Just as keen.

26. Your association has passed a resolution with regard to the importation of Oregon and all foreign timbers?—Yes.