

23. *Mr. Hall.*] Has there been any increase in the auction price of meat?—I should say the average rise in beef has been £2 a head in the last eighteen months. That is fat cattle. There may be cases in which the increase has been more.

24. Can you tell us definitely what the price is to-day for cattle of a certain weight to the farmer?—You can obtain that with every certainty by looking up yesterday morning's *Daily Times*. The prices there given of the Burnside sales are absolutely correct. The only charges to the farmer are railage and commission and saleyard fees.

25. *Mr. Hall.*] What do you estimate the advance in sheep has been in the last five years—say, for good fat wethers?—They have fluctuated just the same as cattle.

26. *Mr. Robertson.*] What dairy company do you supply?—The Taieri and Peninsula Company.

27. What was the highest price paid to you during the last twelve months—say during last winter?—The highest price was during a period of scarcity. I believe it was 1s. 4½d. to 1s. 4½d.

28. Do you supply a creamery?—Yes, we are practically the company. The farmers are the company.

29. You said you were interested in fruit to the extent that you could not get it?—The district I live in cannot grow fruit. It is very hard to grow fruit and vegetables, owing to the droughts and very severe frosts.

30. It reaches a pretty high price if taken out from town?—If you buy it retail; but I think we can buy as cheap from the local storekeeper as it can be bought in Princes Street, Dunedin.

THOMAS O'BYRNE, Secretary of the Timber-workers' Union, examined on oath. (No. 22.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation, Mr. O'Byrne?—I am secretary of the Timber-workers, Southland.

2. You have a pretty wide acquaintance with the timber industry in your district?—Yes, I have had an experience of upwards of eighteen years.

3. Has the cost of timber risen in your district?—Yes, it has risen very considerably. It has just risen recently by 1s. per hundred.

4. Would you tell the Commission what you consider the causes for the rise in timber?—I consider that it is the increased demand that has been the principal cause for the rise in price.

5. What has caused that increased demand?—The increased population. The building trade has been very brisk down there for several years, and, of course, the millers have taken advantage of the briskness to gradually increase the price of timber.

6. Is there any addition to that cost owing to the timber getting further back—costing more in transport in bringing it to the centres?—In some cases that is so, but in many cases the railways have been extended into the forests, and the consequence is that a number of mills have railway-sidings. For instance, one mill which was carting timber for seven or eight years has within the last two or three years had a railway-siding right in their yard. Timber has advanced in price three times since that has been done.

7. You think that the expense of transportation enters very little into the question of the rise?—The country is a bit rougher in places. In some cases they go ahead of the railway, and wait for the railway to come to them. On account of the high price of timber they sometimes go several miles ahead and cart to the terminus of the line. If they could wait until the line comes up there would be no cartage at all.

8. You do not mean carting timber in bulk?—Yes, after the planks are cut. They tram or wagon it to the line.

9. If transportation is not a very serious item in the cost, will you give us your impression as to what is the cause of the increased cost?—The increased demand has been a considerable reason for the increase in price. The sawmillers' association or ring—which consists of most of the large sawmillers—governs the trade. The association is a very strong one. Of course, when the increased demand comes for timber they come together and say, "Here is a show for another rise of 1s. a hundred feet," and we have to pay it.

10. Will you give us some concrete instances of the rise?—I am sorry that I had not more time to compile more information for the Commission. We fully expected that the Commission would come down to Invercargill. The people there are groaning under the high cost of living. It was only yesterday that I decided to come up here, and I have not got as much information as I would like to have had, and which I could have got if I had had more time.

11. The Commission is quite prepared to receive any statement in writing that you may make after you go back?—I will send you a considerable amount of information. In 1889 timber was practically the same price as it was fifteen years ago. At that time rough red-pine 10 in. by 1 in., 4 in. by 2 in., 8 in. by ¾ in., 3 in. by 1 in., and 3 in. by 1½ in.—for these the price was 4s. per hundred feet. This would probably be landed at the purchaser's house, which would not be far from the mill.

12. What was dressed red-pine?—In those days it was 6s. per hundred. It runs from 3s. to 4s. and 6s. This is 8 in. by ½ in.; which is rough lining. 2 in. dado appeared to run from 3s. to 4s. and 6s. They have a very scientific way of arranging the prices now. In those days they were more general. Timber which in those days was 4s. is to-day, delivered on the job, 13s. 6d.

13. Delivered where?—In Invercargill.

14. And dressed red-pine?—From ½ in., 14s. 6d. to 15s. 6d. and 16s. 6d.; ½ in. and under, up to 8 in., I think is 12s. 6d. In those days gone by we used to get it at 3s. The difference is that one is delivered at Invercargill, and the other was closer to the mill—probably a couple of miles from the mill, which would amount to about 1s. a hundred extra.

15. Do you estimate 1s. from the mill to Invercargill?—It depends upon the distance. I am going to put these prices in as evidence. I may point out that the railway freight for timber was reduced after the Timber Commission, so that the sawmiller is in a more happy position.