

16. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Who has got the benefit of the reduced railway freight?—The public has not got it, because the price has gone up. The timber-merchants have got the benefit.

17. I understand you to say that there is a combination of millowners?—They are all in together. The timber-merchants and a number of the millowners have a common understanding.

18. You have a printed price-list—the millowners' price for timber—showing that they have a common understanding?—Yes, it is a very long list to read out, but I will put it in as evidence. Timber has gone up in some cases 200 per cent. in fifteen years.

19. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Has that rise been steady?—Yes, every year during the last few years they have put 1s. a hundred on to timber.

20. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Can you tell me if the increased cost of labour has influenced the price to any appreciable extent?—For the last twelve years, so far as award rates are concerned, the men have not received 2s. per day increase.

21. Can you tell me definitely to what extent that would appreciate the price of timber?—1s. a day all round increase to the men would raise the price of timber about 4½d. per hundred feet. I say there has been a 2s. rise to the men during the last twelve years. That is equivalent to 9d. per hundred feet of timber. Yet timber has risen over 200 per cent. Second-class scantling was sold in those days at 2s. 6d.; to-day it is 9s. There is the extra cost of taking it from the mill—probably about 1s.

22. *Mr. Hall.*] What is the price of red-pine at Invercargill at the present time?—I have got the whole list here. Anything up to 16s. 6d. It goes up even as high as £1 2s.—that is, in Invercargill. I have here the evidence and award of the Arbitration Court, which I hand in to the Commission. Take 2 in. by 2 in., 100 superficial feet, scotia, red-pine: you can get it at 8s. 6d. a hundred in the rough. It is just put through a planing-machine, costing about 6d. a hundred, and when it comes out they sell it by lineal feet, and it works out at £1 13s. per hundred.

23. *Mr. Macdonald.*] You want to add a little more than the labour—there is the interest on the machine?—Yes. I may state that fifteen men will produce in reasonable country something like 4,000 ft. a day.

24. *The Chairman.*] What do you mean by producing—do you mean from the time the timber is cut standing in the forest?—Till it is landed at the railway-siding. Give those men 1s. a day rise: that adds 4½d. to the price of the timber. I have an account here of a man's income and expenditure while working at a mill. The miller supplied him and his family with food at certain prices. In March he worked for twenty-two days; his wages amounted to £8 16s., and the sum he paid to the sawmiller for commodities was £7 16s. [Account handed in.]

25. He might have had things from the store—clothing, boots, &c.?—It was principally food for himself and his wife.

26. Why did he work on certain days only?—On account of the rough weather. He had a debit of £4 6s. 2d. after working for six months. He had to cut his store bill according to his wages.

27. *Mr. Veitch.*] You mentioned that some mills are close to the railway and others are a considerable distance away. I need not ask you whether there is a difference in the cost of production. Is there any difference in the charges?—They have a price-list and they all charge alike.

28. The man who is furthest away is making his business pay?—Yes.

29. Then the man who is nearest the station must be making an enormous profit?—Yes, they are making a tremendous profit.

30. I think you said that fifteen years ago the increase became more apparent?—Yes.

31. When did the millers' association come into existence?—Seven or eight years ago.

32. Has the increase been more rapid since the millers' association came into existence?—Yes, it has been constantly increasing.

33. They sort the timber out into different grades?—Yes.

34. Could you let the Commission have a few copies of the annual report of your union?—Yes.

35. Do you know the method adopted by the millers' association to keep its membership together: how would they deal with a member who broke the association's rules?—I do not know. They have a very strong association, and it works very strongly against us when we want an increase of wages.

36. *The Chairman.*] Do you know if they have an agreement in writing? Is it registered?—I do not think so.

37. *Mr. Veitch.*] Is it your opinion that it is owing to the timber-millers' association that the cost of timber has gone up, and that wages have not been as good as they should be?—Wages are not as good as they should be, and they are not as good as they should be now.

38. *Mr. Macdonald.*] What are the wages now?—The average is about 10s. a day.

39. What area is allowed to each mill?—About 800 acres altogether. I think that the State should run the whole business.

40. Do you not think the price of timber would come down considerably if the State allowed larger areas to be taken up?—I do not think the price would come down. It would increase, because they would have a monopoly.

41. They have a monopoly as it is. The State tried to prevent that monopoly and did not succeed?—A number of millers in Southland have a monopoly of the best timber.

42. *The Chairman.*] Your opinion is that the selling-price is what they can get out of the public?—Yes, it is a matter of what we are prepared or able to pay. We have to pay the monopoly prices.

43. *Mr. Macdonald.*] I see that on the West Coast they cannot sell timber at any price?—We have plenty of orders; the trade is very brisk down south, and has been for a number of years, and that has been the cause of the rise in the price of timber.

44. *Mr. Robertson.*] What effect has the importation of Oregon pine had on the prices?—Putting the extra charge on the imported timber has allowed the local millers to advance the price of our native timber.

45. *Mr. Hall.*] Is there a differential rate on the railways?—Yes; they charge more for Oregon pine than for red-pine.