

*To Mr. Luke:* I should like the weight of the Committee put on to the powers that be to hurry up Lake Coleridge to be available for South Canterbury.

*To the Chairman:* Timaru has an existing plant of 275 kilowatts. We have made profits out of it, accumulating about £3,000. Local bodies should not be allowed to go in for headworks that cannot be used later on.

F. BARKAS, Timaru Chamber of Commerce, examined.

A sub-committee of the Chamber of Commerce asked me to get together some information with regard to the railway tariff. There have been grumbles with regard to the railway tariff for some years past, and the object of the Chamber of Commerce was to get some definite statement of the grounds for these grumbles. I put a letter in the paper asking any person or firm having information with regard to any portion of the railway tariff that is prejudicial to the expansion of the industries in the town, or if suggestions could be made that would be for the benefit of the country settlers in this respect—I asked if they would communicate with me. The principal anomaly as far as Timaru is concerned is, and has been for many years, I understand, that the railway tariff has not been scientifically adjusted for a great number of years. There have been tinkering and alterations as pressure or temporary necessity has arisen. The main anomalies with regard to the industries of Timaru are these: that Timaru, with its improved harbour—a harbour which the Chairman of the Harbour Board informs me has now the capacity of the Hull docks, and is capable of a very large handling of shipping—has made Timaru a possible centre of distribution, which was not the case a few years ago when the railway tariff was established. At the present time distributors from Christchurch can send “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D” classes of goods as “D” goods to Timaru—on the “D” goods rate, which is at the present moment 26s. 6d. plus 10 per cent. plus 10 per cent.

*The Chairman:* Has Timaru not a similar privilege?

*Mr. Barkas:* No; if a Timaru resident wishes to send goods to Christchurch he pays 49s. 4d. plus 10 per cent. plus 10 per cent.—that is, the “A” rate. As typical distributors and industrial producers I take Messrs. John Jackson and Co., wood-workers, and Mr. A. Hutchison, baking-powder manufacturer. These firms have furnished me with letters, which I hand to the Committee. Both these firms are distributors of the “A” class of goods. Messrs. Jackson and Co. pay 59s. 8d. per ton to send their goods to Christchurch; and exactly the same class of goods are sent from Christchurch to Timaru for 32s. 1d. per ton. If we send goods to Oamaru, which is fifty-three miles, with very easy traction, the charge is 18s. 2d. per ton on certain classes of goods, and if Dunedin sends to Oamaru, which is seventy-eight miles, with pretty heavy traction over the Blueskin, the rate is only 12s. 6d. Those are the two points that are enlarged upon in Messrs. Jackson and Co.’s letter. They also say, “Another matter which we should be glad if you will bring under the notice of the Committee is the Customs tariff so far as it affects our wood-bending branch of the business. Under the heading ‘Carriage and cart makers’ material’ bent wheel-rims are admitted free. The ash or hickory strips of timber to bend same are rightly admitted free, but we contend that the bent rims should be dutiable in the same way as shafts, spokes, and felloes (dressed) are subject to 20 per cent., as the timber for making the rims is dressed before being bent. The object of admitting duty-free certain goods used in the manufacture of vehicles and parts thereof was presumably to assist local industries to compete with the imported article, and thus find employment for our own people. Many years ago we established a wood-bending department, but both railway and Customs tariffs prevent us extending this business as it could be done if the disabilities under which we work were removed.” In his letter Mr. Hutchison states, “Some time ago the manager of the Timaru Baking-powder Company brought under the notice of one or other of the members of the Chamber of Commerce that we as manufacturers were greatly handicapped in open competition by the railway charges on our manufactured goods. Baking-powder from Timaru or Christchurch is charged as under: Class ‘A,’ 49s. 4d. per ton, as compared with 26s. 6d. per ton Christchurch to Timaru, plus 10 per cent. plus 10 per cent. in both cases. It is only between these two places that any difference in freight does exist.” [Letter handed in.] The only other response I had to my invitation was one from a back-country settler. It is a very interesting letter. He says, “For several years now, and more especially the last two or perhaps three years, there have been hauling-engines travelling from here to Timaru and back for the purpose of taking wool and grain, and back-loading manure, coal, benzine, and other material. G. S. Meredith and Co. had two engines on the road hauling wool from here (Waihaorunga) to Timaru, and back-loading manure from Smithfield and Parcora. Cummings Bros. had one engine, and were trying to procure trucks to put the second engine on hauling. One of these plants has been known to lift wool out of the railway goods-sheds, Waihao Downs, and take it on by road to Timaru.” The letter contains other interesting information. I hand the letter in for the perusal of the members of the Committee. Another suggestion that has been made is that the Railway Department should secure motor-lorries. Now that the war is over they will probably be procurable at cheap rates, and it is suggested that a system of collecting goods might be established, to be redistributed by railway. [Letter handed in.]

*To the Chairman:* I am aware that Timaru participates in some advantages of special tariff rates. The request that is now made is that the anomaly drawn attention to should be removed. We want the same facilities granted from Timaru to Christchurch as are granted from Christchurch to Timaru.

*Mr. Hornsby:* I take it that your chief aim is that this Committee should recommend that the whole railway tariff should be scientifically adjusted, and that the whole country should have an understandable railway tariff?