

SAWMILLING SECTION.

[This Section is published by arrangement with the Dominion Federated Sawmillers' Association (Incorp.) in the interests of the Sawmilling Industry of N.Z.]

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Deputations from the Carpenters and Joiners, and Timber Workers' Unions have recently waited on the Premier regarding the housing problem and shortage of timber, and amongst other requests have asked that non-essential building be stopped, the duty removed from foreign timber, and that no timber should be exported from the Dominion whilst the present shortage lasts. One delegate advocated the buying up by the Government of all timber produced, at full export rates, and the distribution or rationing of it according to some definite plan. The Premier in reply practically gave in his adherence to the war regulation whereby no building other than dwellings of a value exceeding £3000 can be erected without consent of the proper authority. We are of opinion this is only fair and that it should be the means of conserving available supplies of timber and other building materials for the erection of dwellings, and so help to some extent to overcome the shortage. As to the remission of duty; that was a Government matter which would be considered by Cabinet, and the exportation of building timber from the Dominion is under the strict supervision of the Board of Trade, but if any attempt were made to stop all export, Australia would probably retaliate, and as we were dependent upon back loading of coal, wheat, and other Australian products we could not do without.

Our attention has been drawn to a resolution recently passed at a Conference of the Wellington Provincial Farmers' Union to the effect that "The Government be urged to remit the import duty on all timber, and that railway freights on imported timber be brought into line with the N.Z. timber rates," but we are of opinion an increased duty might well be imposed on all foreign timbers, and that the example of the Commonwealth should be followed in this respect. As to the railage rate on hardwood imported into the Dominion, there can be no doubt that the extra weight alone justifies the increased tariff for the carriage of this timber.

It is very doubtful if a reasonable rate of interest on the capital involved in the Sawmilling industry has been earned by those engaged in it during the past 25 years, and yet the business is made the butt of all sorts and conditions of men whose comments are usually made in complete ignorance of the true facts, and were it not for the organisations brought into existence within the past few years for the purpose of watching the interests of those engaged in it, we should be relegated into a state of oblivion.

With perhaps the single exception of coal mining, no industry is of more vital importance to the community than our own, and having regard to the number of men engaged, together with their dependants, and the risks attending every phase of the business, we are entitled to receive every consideration at the hands of the community in place of the usual denunciations we are accustomed to.

Notwithstanding the wild statements which are continually appearing in the daily press with regard to the quantity of timber exported from the Dominion, the following official figures clearly show that export has been largely reduced and every effort is being made to cope with the present shortage. For the nine months ending 31st March last the Board of Trade authorised the issue of permits to export rimu to the extent of 20,390,000ft. whereas only 8,503,000ft. were actually shipped, and with respect to kauri, permits were authorised for the shipment of 3,267,000ft. for 6 months ending 31st March, whereas in actual fact only 384,000ft. of this timber was exported. All things being equal sawmillers with a few exceptions, have no desire to export, so long as the local price is on a parity with the export price, but as some millers have gone to great trouble and expense in building up an Australian connection, it is not reasonable that this should be suddenly dropped, especially in cases where a class of timber is shipped which could not be marketed locally. Apart from all this surely the mutual exchange of the products of countries is an advantage to the inhabitants of each, and if it be borne in mind that each 100ft. of timber exported to the commonwealth practically represents a bag of wheat in exchange, we should be in a parlous state if we attempted to stop all export.

A new award for the Auckland Industrial District Country mills operating outside a radius of ten miles from the G.P.O. has been approved by the Council of Conciliation on which the Sawmillers' representatives were Messrs T. M. Lane, H. Valder, and Jos. Butler. If ratified by the Court of Arbitration, as we have reason to believe, it will become operative for a period of three years from 10th May, 1920.

Westland is also faced with an application for an increase of 15 per cent. on present award rates owing to the increased cost of living, all of which fore-shadows increased cost of production and higher prices.