

# Sawmilling Section.

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## The Tariff.

On November 3rd the Budget and new Customs Tariff were placed before Parliament by the Government, and consideration of these two matters is probably the most important work before the House this Session.

To all those engaged in the timber industry, whether employer or employee, the lack of provision in the Tariff for any increase in the duty on imported timbers and timber manufactures will come as a surprise and disappointment. There is not even any provision for preference for British timbers, and the same old duties are proposed to be perpetuated in practically the same unscientific schedule that was brought into force so very many years ago, and the duty of 2s. per 100 on rough sawn timber is to continue the same as it has been ever since 1871, fifty years ago!!!

Rough sawn Ash, Hickory, Lance-wood, Lignum Vitae, Beech-wood, Cedar, Oak and Walnut are to come in free, apparently simply to satisfy a popular craze or fashion of the public for furniture of imported woods, while we have timbers in New Zealand incomparably better than anything which may be imported for furniture and interior fittings. It would appear, however, that our present Government in its wisdom considers that it would be better to continue to fell and burn these timbers and make "one blade of grass grow where two trees grew before" and continue to send millions of pounds out of the country to support foreign and black labour in forest industries.

Consider Japanese Oak—a timber which has been shown to take the borer within practically a few months of landing—on the free list!! while we have such a wonderful furniture timber in Beech going up in smoke by the millions of feet simply to please a popular fancy and for lack of reasonable protection for our native timbers.

What is to become of our newly inaugurated Forest Service and the much vaunted Forest Policy of the Government if this same Government continues to allow low grade foreign timbers to be dumped wholesale into this country? Is it not almost humourously ironical that with one hand our all-seeing Ministry is erecting under the Forests Bill a new Department of State which has been proclaimed as essential on all sides, while simultaneously with the other hand, by means of the Timber Schedule of the new Tariff, it puts an obstacle in the path of this new Service which will render all its efforts and scientific knowledge of little avail.

It would be a very different matter if it were possible for the timber interests in New Zealand to take advantage of any increase in the Tariff to raise the prices of timber to the consuming public. The Government, however, has absolute control of timber prices and continues to exercise this control through the Department of Industries and Commerce. This is surely sufficient safeguard that the public would not be exploited were reasonable protection given to the industry and the very forests for the control of which our same all-seeing Government has created a special Department.

Look also how meckly our Government forces the people of New Zealand to lie down to the indignity placed upon us by our Australian neighbours in treating New Zealand as a "foreign country" by its new Tariff. It is a fact that for tariff purposes New Zealand verily is a "foreign country" in the eyes of Australia, for that country has imposed a duty of 6s. per 100 on New Zealand timbers, the same as charged on Japanese, Swedish, American and other foreign timbers. Our Government proposes to continue to allow Australian timbers to come into New Zealand partly on the free list and partly under the low duty of 2s. per 100.

Then also, how progressive we are, for we do not propose to make any alteration in a duty which was imposed 50 years ago. Had the duty on timber been on an *ad valorem* basis at 2s. per 100 fifty years ago we would now be paying a duty of at least 10s. per 100, for it is quite safe to estimate that timber has increased in value from at most 5s. to at least 25s. in that period.

America has imposed an Emergency Tariff which practically prohibits the entry into that country of our wool, meat and butter, but we must not retaliate. We must continue to allow their low grades of timber produced by inferior grades of labour—Chinese, Hindu, Japanese and Middle-East European—to enter this country at the same "gentle" tariff as was imposed 50 years ago.

It is sufficient to make the late Sir David Hutchens "turn in his grave" to think that our all-wise Government has so little concern for our forests and their welfare and proper utilisation that it does not see fit to give them reasonable protection against the admittedly inferior timbers from foreign countries.

The industry itself is the second largest employer of labour in New Zealand, and is also the second largest industry in respect to the amount of capital involved. It contributes in no small measure to making New Zealand self-supporting, it swells the country's exports, and in the future—