

SAWMILLING SECTION.

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Editor: Mr. W. T. IRVINE.

We notice the Governor's speech at the opening of Parliament foreshadows legislation with regard to afforestation and the regulation of timber export from New Zealand, and are aware the former has been in contemplation for some time past and that the Department will be in charge of Sir Francis Bell. In this connection it is desirable that the proposed legislation should be submitted to the Council of the New Zealand Forestry League, which should have the opportunity of expressing an opinion on the measure after being introduced to the House and we commend the matter to the President of the League, Sir James Wilson, for his earnest consideration. We are now fortunate in having secured a fair number of sawmillers as members of the League, and other associations and companies would do well to follow the example of the Main Trunk Timber Trade Protection Guild members, who have all joined the Forestry League so as to place themselves in the position of being in closer touch with all matters pertaining to afforestation. Successful forestry departments have been in existence in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland for some years. America is waking up to the necessity of starting the growth of new timber to replace in some measure what is cut down and it must be admitted the step taken on behalf of the Dominion is in the right direction so long as it is carried out on sane lines and after the most careful investigation by thoroughly qualified experts who would make a study of our timbers before advocating regeneration or replacement, by the introduction of fast-growing firs, spruce, etc. As to the limitation of export, this is already provided for by the Timber Regulations recently Gazetted as a war measure, but it is evidently intended there shall be an extension of these Regulations to remain in existence after the close of the war. We shall hope to comment upon the measures as soon as they are brought down, as we want to see them studied from the practical view point of bush sawmillers.

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Under date, Sydney, 21st October, we learn that at the Annual Conference of the Country Press Association, the Secretary stated that the Government was experimenting in the production of newspaper from Australian timbers, and if the experiment proved satisfactory, it was proposed to subsidise the industry to the amount of £250,000 and establish mills to provide thirty thousand tons of wood pulp fibre annually. This would, of course, have the effect of increasing the value of all timbers.

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Labour conditions along the Main Trunk show no improvement, notwithstanding the return of so many drafts of late. Wages are continually on the up grade

and many men are placed on the wages sheets at so much per week "wet or dry." Having regard to the exceptionally bad weather experienced right through the winter, this of course adds greatly to the cost of production and must be passed on to the public in the shape of higher prices for our timber. This too is not the worst feature the miller has to contend with, as no one will dispute the fact that lessened falls are the rule rather than the exception. The question of labour will have to be faced sooner or later and whilst we have every sympathy with the cause of the honest workman, the majority must be educated to see that anything that makes for non-efficiency and lowers the all round standard of work, cannot possibly be in the best interests of the workmen themselves in the long run. If good men stuck to their jobs more rigidly, and a system of profit-sharing were introduced entitling those who had put in, say, twelve months or more steady work, to a share of the profits beyond a legitimate return on the capital involved in a risky business such as sawmilling undoubtedly is, a better state of things than exists at present might be hoped for. The Federation should certainly aim at raising the standard of work and educating the workmen by all means in its power.

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The joint purchase of mill supplies has been undertaken by at least one Association on the Main Trunk but the system is capable of indefinite extension and if belting, saws, files, nails, axes, oils and other lines could be standardised after careful investigation, a great saving could be made to all millers willing to join together to pool their buying, as well as their selling.

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Most of the mills that were burned down in the big Raetihi fire are now in operation or will be very soon, and several new ones are in course of erection in the Ohakune and Raehiti districts. Notwithstanding this the output does not equal the demand, and a difficulty is being experienced in obtaining timber for shipment to fulfil freight engagements under contract, whereas a short time since the converse applied and it was difficult then to secure the necessary freight for timber exports. Home requirements are being chiefly used for large buildings such as wool stores, freezing works extension, hospitals and other public buildings, cottage building being reduced to a minimum. The usual outcry against the sawmiller continues to crop up, and the Chamber of Commerce in one or two cases have been urged to influence the Government to instruct the Board of Trade to hold an investigation with regard to the prices of timber. Why not with regard to the prices of all other materials used in the construction of a building?