

Australian Import Tax on Timber.

Advice has been received by private cable from Melbourne that the recently revised Commonwealth tariff includes a substantial increase in the import duty on New Zealand timber to Australia. Hitherto the rate for white and red pine has been one shilling per 100ft. The new duty is 3s. 6d. per 100ft., with the exception of white pine used in Australia solely for the manufacture of butter boxes.

Board of Trade Act, 1919.

The following is a digest of the New Zealand Board of Trade Act, 1919, prepared by Mr. F. Cooper, Secretary to the Canterbury Employers' Association, and published for general information.

The Board of Trade Act, 1919 (Nov. 4, 1919), is designed to make better provision for the maintenance and control of the industries, trade and commerce of New Zealand.

The Act provides that if you are engaged, for profit, in any trade, business, profession or undertaking, you may be called by the Board of Trade—which consists of the Minister for Commerce and four others, three to form a quorum—to answer any question, and produce any books or documents in order to satisfy the Board whether you are obtaining more than is deemed by it to be a fair and reasonable profit, or whether you are destroying or hoarding goods or refusing to make them available for sale, in order to enhance the value of other similar goods to the public. Regulations may make it an offence to differentiate in rates for goods or services as between different persons or classes of persons.—Sections 2, 6, 14, 32 (3), 26 (1a).

An inquiry either for prosecution or investigation may be held at the instance of the Board on its own initiative, or by reference from Governor-General, or at the instance of any person.—Section 13.

The Board may do this either in its own corporate capacity or through association of experts, who may be your competitors. Failure to comply with requests of Board as to evidence, production of books, etc., is an offence punishable by a fine of £100 or three months' imprisonment.—Sections 17 (1), 18 (1).

Offenders against any trade regulation shall be liable on summary conviction before a magistrate to a fine of £200 or three months' imprisonment under one section; £1000 penalty under another section.—Sections 30 (1), 31 (1).

Offenders against regulations in respect of selling, supplying, or offering to sell or supply any goods at a price which is unreasonably high are liable in the case of persons to £200 fines, and in the case of corporate bodies to £1000. The offence may date back three years or five years.—Sections 32 (4), 30 (3).

No prosecution shall be instituted except with the consent of the Board of Trade.—Sections 31 (10), 30 (2).

The Board has power to fix maximum and minimum selling prices.—Sections 32 (6), 21 (10).

The Board must investigate privately, but may publish facts, and is free from action for defamation. The Board may issue inquiries to be answered by letter to a time and in a form required. Refusal to comply or false information, is punishable by a fine of £100; deceit or obstruction, £100 or three months' imprisonment. The information is confidential, but the Board may publish, and publication is privileged.—Sections 21, 23 (2), 23 (4), 23 (5), 23 (6).

Subsidy to Builders in England.

The subsidy to builders of £150 per house that is referred to elsewhere in this issue, seems to have aroused a deal of opposition in some quarters. Major Barnes, in speaking in the English Parliament on the subject, complained that by this proposal the jerry-builder and the speculator were to be subsidised. He insisted that the pressure which had produced the Bill came from landowners and land jobbers who had got land on their hands which under the Housing Act was unsaleable. Mr. Lorden, a London builder in a large way, expressed the hope that the application of the Bill would be so extended as to encourage the building of middle-class houses, of which there was just as great a scarcity as of working-class houses. He warned the Government that, instead of the middle-classes going up to better houses, they would have to come down to the houses proposed to be erected under the Bill.

Sir J. Tudor Walters, who replied for the Government, gave away the whole case for the original Act. He is the new broom whom the Prime Minister has appointed to clear up the housing muddle. He gave it as his opinion that they could get their 100,000 houses built by men who were not contracting for local authorities, and at least 70 or 80 per cent. of the men they employed would be a new contribution to the housing construction of the country. As for the local authorities' housing schemes, he believed there was never so much profiteering in the building trade as was going on under them. Three classes of people were profiteering—the people who supplied the materials, the contractor who was carrying out the work, and the workmen who were laying the bricks. He affirmed his belief that any contractor who wanted to could build these houses for at least £300 less than they were doing to-day.

After this candid confession—and several appeals to the Government to encourage the building of wooden houses on the Canadian model—the House had no alternative but to vote the second reading without a division,