

REG. 30.11.26

X SOFTWOOD SLEEPERS.

ECONOMICAL VALUE URGED.

Mr. R. H. Chapman (Chief Engineer of the South Australian Railways Department), who recently completed an extensive tour of the world, gave evidence before the Railways Standing Committee at Parliament House, Adelaide, on Monday. The members present were:—Mr. O'Halloran (Chairman), the Hons. J. H. Cooke and J. Carr, M.L.C.'s, and Messrs. Reidy, Blackwell, and Nicholls, M.P.'s.

The Chairman said Mr. Chapman had undertaken to examine various phases of railway systems in other countries, for the benefit of the South Australian system. Although the Railways Standing Committee was constituted primarily for the examination and discussion of proposed lines, the question of costs, including the price of sleepers, was an important factor. More was paid for sleepers in South Australia than in any other Australian State. This was due, partly, to the fact that there were in the State no big hardwood forests for sleepers. The Government wanted to know whether it was not possible to establish some system whereby they could use up their softwoods. The committee wished Mr. Chapman to make a statement upon railway costs generally, and upon the sleeper question in particular. If local timbers could be utilized in preference to imported hardwoods for sleepers, it would not only solve the problem of prohibitive prices to the State, in that direction, but mean the saving of the local industry.

Mr. Chapman said the situation abroad in sleepers was entirely different from what it was at home. In North America he had seen a number of big forests, and sleepers were very much cheaper on that Continent than in South Australia, in fact, they cost less than half the price here. Various kinds of pine were used, chiefly 8 ft. by 6 ft. was a common size for a sleeper in America. He could not say that they lasted as long or had the strength of those used here.

In reply to a question, witness said he did not see any concrete sleepers in England. They were only in the experimental stage. Italy, France, and other Continental countries had wooden sleepers, the same as in England, where they were mostly imported. The use of softwood for sleepers, continued Mr. Chapman meant treatment and plates. It was difficult to make a comparison of prices, also the length of life. The Chairman said the State Conservator of Forests (Mr. E. Julius) had stated some time ago that the total cost of sleepers at the mill was 7/ for broad gauge, and 5/3 for narrow gauge. That was as he estimated them available in South Australian forests. Could the witness give any suggestion or scheme for using the softwood sleepers? There were the matters of treatment, cost of laying, the life of the sleeper, and, the cost of relaying to be considered.

The witness expressed the opinion that the Forestry Department should submit tenders to the Railway Department. If definite offers were put up to the commissioners, the amount of saving and durability would be determined.

The Chairman said nothing had resulted from enquiries up to the present. Before the Government could consent definitely to any policy they must have something to go upon. If the Forestry Department would make a definite offer, and consider prices, that would open up a suggestion.

Mr. Reidy said they were up against it. There were between 12,000 and 14,000

acres of forests in the south-east, and in the north of this State. The trees in most cases, were ripe, and matured, but there was no market. The market was controlled by the imported timbers. There was the Australian oak, or stringy bark, to be experimented on. On the subject of rails, Mr. Chapman said he had found over a considerable territory the 85-lb. rail being run on by 60,000 lb. axle weight.