

106. Do you not think it would pay the company to put on colliers?—I do not think it would. Wellington could not absorb it. Mokau Jones said, "I will get steamers to bring a thousand tons every fortnight." But I said it would not do; Wellington cannot take so much; the circumstances are practically impossible. They cannot take it away from the wharf. And there is another element: If there were only about one-third of the dealers it could be sold at less, as the greater turnover could be done on a smaller margin, and plant fully employed.

107. *The Chairman.*] How many coal-dealers are there in Wellington?—Thirty-six.

108. I think you are all convinced that it would be better to dispose of the coal in its native state—that is, the state in which it is mined—the effect being that the coal could be disposed of more cheaply; still you are sceptical as to whether the public could be induced to take it?—I do not think they would.

109. Why do you think that? If the coal was equally good, why would they not take it? Do you not think that the cause is that it has not been introduced to them?—I will tell you where it would break down. If you had half a dozen dealers here, and they said they would sell the coal as it comes from the mine, and we will deliver it to you at £1 5s.; and if you did not like it you could do without. You may agree to do that, but some one would grumble, and a dealer, to get a customer, would take the coal and screen it.

110. *Mr. Tanner.*] Do not householders buy the screenings readily?—No; there is no consumption for it.

111. What do you do with it?—You can only get at the most 1s. a bag, and you may have to cart it a mile or two for that. You may be able to sell it to coachbuilders, but you cannot sell it to blacksmiths. Neither Cardiff nor Westport is good smithy-coal.

112. Do you get rid of it to furnaces?—They burn it for boilers and that sort of thing, but it does not do for the smithy-work.

113. So you are not sanguine of the possibility of getting the public to take the coal without been screened?—You might be able if you could do as I say, but while there is the number of dealers I have stated the smaller ones are always trying to get an advantage. If you had a written agreement it would break in a week.

114. *Mr. Hogg.*] Owing to the richness of the Westport coal it should sell readily?—Yes.

115. There must be an enormous waste going on?—Yes.

116. *The Chairman.*] Do you not think the law should compel dealers to carry scales, so that those who receive coal in bags could demand that it be weighed?—There would then be no question as to weight, but it would entail more labour in delivery.

WEDNESDAY, 4TH OCTOBER, 1899.

Hon. G. McLEAN, M.L.C., Chairman of Directors, Union Steamship Company, examined.
(No. 15.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are aware that the impression exists throughout the colony that there is an arrangement between the Westport Coal Company and the Union Company whereby a vessel not a Union boat cannot obtain a cargo of coal on equal terms at Westport. You must have heard that. What have you to say to that statement?—The fact that other boats can get it is a contradiction to that. I would like to state this: that the agreement between the Westport Coal Company and ourselves has expired for a good time. There is no agreement that I am aware of existing now. I think you will see by the rates of freight that they are remarkably moderate. We have no interest, either directly or indirectly, in the Westport Coal Company, except the carrying of the coal and the buying of the small coal. It is a great advantage to the Westport Company to get rid of their small coal to us. I have no share in any coal-mine myself, and never had. Our company is perfectly clear and distinct from the Westport Coal Company. We have always worked harmoniously in a give-and-take way. We are, of course, anxious for the trade to increase, as the more coal they can sell the more carrying we will get. I have heard the report you mention very often, and I am glad that this Committee is set up, and that we are able to put the actual state of the case before you and dispel that idea.

2. What I meant when I asked you this question was that this alleged arrangement existed only in respect of coal for disposal within the colony, and did not apply to coal outside the colony?—There is no such arrangement.

3. What I meant was that the impression prevails in the minds of many people: Suppose a vessel goes to Westport for a cargo of coal for disposal within the colony, she cannot get it?—There is nothing between us that will prevent them. It rests entirely with the Westport Company.

4. There is no understanding or agreement between you and the Westport Coal Company?—No; though we would not like them to give the carrying to other people.

5. Well, then, there is a tacit understanding?—No; only that we provide whatever tonnage they require, and they undertake to give us despatch in loading.

6. You would not look with favour on their giving the carriage of their coal to anybody else?—No; because it would interfere with the despatch of our steamers, and we could not then carry at present low rates.

7. You had an agreement?—Yes, up to a certain time. I could not say when, but I fancy it is about two years ago. Since then we have had no agreement.

8. What was the effect, approximately, of that agreement?—They guaranteed us a certain quantity of freight in the year, for which we undertook to provide tonnage and to carry at certain rates, and we were to buy a certain quantity of their coal. The fact is, the Anchor boats buy coal from them, also the Black Ball steamers and other boats. For instance, we do not carry for them to Foxton or Wanganui. A great deal of coal goes to those places, but other boats carry it—the Anchor line, I think, also Levin and Co. and Seager's. They all buy coal at Westport.