

23. You have not heard it suggested that Sims, Cooper, and Co. and Fletcher and Co. would build works of their own?—No; the nearest approach to that was that shortly after we commenced building operations Mr. Bevans came along with a suggestion from an American firm to buy us out. We had that proposal made to us from Mr. Bevans.

24. Whom does he represent?—I understand he was representing not Armour and Co., but several American meat firms. He had made a visit to the States, and our works had been started during his absence, and on his return he was greatly surprised that we had got on so far as we had, and a gentleman had come out evidently with the definite idea of making a start in our district. You can understand that in a district like ours, so remote from existing works, the farmers have been handicapped by depreciation and loss of stock in conveying them such a distance to the works. That was our main objective in putting up the works—to save the farmers that depreciation; and the district in the past has been looked upon as a “happy hunting-ground” for existing meat firms all over the North Island.

25. You feel that you have forestalled them?—Yes, we hope so, and would do so under legitimate competition.

26. How will the farmers view works being put up by others except themselves?—Well, nine-tenths of them are shareholders in our company; but at the same time you know what the farmers are—if they are offered a slightly increased remuneration per head they do not consider the shares in their own company very much. I take it the object of the Committee is to save the farmers against themselves.

27. What connection has Mr. Bevans with the Meat Trust?—I do not know, but undoubtedly he would be a most valuable witness. It was he who started the Whangarei works—Fletcher and Co.’s works—which were bought by Vestey and Co.

28. *Mr. Forbes.*] Your works are purely farmers’ co-operative works?—Yes. We hope to open them in December.

29. Have you got promises of anything like payable support with regard to stock?—We have circularized our shareholders. All the returns are not yet in, but in conversation with the secretary last week he informed me that our space was fully applied for. Sufficient stock was forthcoming to fill the works.

30. Did you have any difficulty in raising the capital?—Very little. The farmers were most enthusiastic. I believe our share capital was practically a record in New Zealand so far as farmers’ co-operative concerns go.

31. What money did you raise?—Something over £80,000 in share capital.

32. *Mr. Talbot.*] What is the capacity of the works?—A thousand sheep and two hundred head of cattle per day.

33. And the storage capacity?—From eighty thousand to a hundred thousand, and machinery capacity for another 50 per cent.

34. *Mr. Forbes.*] You are looking for some protection for your industry?—Exactly.

35. You think there is a real danger of your company being wiped out if the American companies are allowed a free hand?—A company of our financial stability would be one of the first to go. Under present existing conditions, not being firmly established, and meeting with fierce competition, I do not think we could stand it.

36. You think the Government should assist you on account of the interests of the farmers?—Undoubtedly.

37. *Mr. Witty.*] What facilities have you for getting the stock to the works and away—is it all road-work?—Yes. There is a railway within thirteen or fourteen miles at Matatahi.

38. Could you give us any idea of the best way in which to combat the Meat Trust?—No. My own idea, and the idea of most of our country people, is that it is a matter almost beyond the New Zealand Government: that it requires the assistance of the Imperial authorities to take the matter up, with regard to the disposal of the meat at the other end, if anything is to be gained. We consider that in the hands of the Meat Trust the New Zealand Government would be a mere toy.

39. Do you think the suggestions made by Mr. Elliott are of any value if they could be carried out?—I think so. I agree with Mr. Elliott that the initiative should come from the producing community.

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CHARLES JOHN REAKES further examined. (No. 7.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You have been called before the Committee again to supplement the evidence you gave on a previous occasion?—Yes. One thing I promised the Committee was a list of the meat-exporters as distinct from the freezing companies, and also the names of their agents in Great Britain. I have a list of the exporters, but I have not yet been able to get a list of their agents at Home. I now hand in the list I have, and also a supplementary list showing the men operating in the various districts. [*Vide Exhibits 1 and 2.*] Then I promised to obtain a list of the freezing companies which were buying companies—companies which bought fat stock on their own account and put it through on their own account, as distinct from those which operated solely on account of clients. There are a great many of them which do both, and it would be rather difficult to get an absolutely accurate list unless I wrote to each company and asked them to tell me what the exact nature of their operations are. Speaking on general lines, without presuming to be absolutely exact, the companies which are principally buying companies—that is, buyers of fat stock—are those I have ticked on the list. [*Vide Exhibit 5.*] Then, another statement I promised was the names of the shareholders of W. and R. Fletcher and Co. (Limited). There are two shareholders: one is Mr. Stanley George Chambers, public accountant,