

99. In regard to the system of nominating meat, does your scheme deal with that difficulty?—Yes, it absolutely does away with it.

100. That is, you think, one of the first necessities?—Yes. I suppose there are some farmers on this Committee, and I will undertake to say that not one of them values that system of nomination. The big farmer, who is perhaps associated with things at the other end, might value it, but with the bulk of them it is no good—it is only a means to assist the Meat Trust and the big operators to nobble the surplus meat at the other end.

101. You do not think the people of this country should own the ships—you think we can control them without owning them?—Yes, I am rather against the Government going in for State ownership, but I believe in State control in every direction. I would suggest State control to apportion the space in ships. I would also suggest that the State should grade the meat going through the works. That is a matter that would be better under the control of the Government than in the hands of the individual freezing companies.

102. You think that the Freights Reduction Committee would not be a sufficient check on that?—No. I think we should aim at the Government and the farmers getting about eighteen or twenty boats to endeavour to relieve the congestion, and be a dominating factor in settling freight rates. We could then discuss the question of what the freights should be. If the farmers combined together to get a line of ships and were subsidized by the Government, and the Government were to have a voice in the settlement of those freights, it would be a good thing for every one in every walk of life. Not only the farmers but the merchants of this Dominion would have to join in the production of a fund to purchase ships to carry our products to the Old Country and bring our imports to the Dominion.

103. Do you think there is any hope of the farmers in this country combining to fight the Meat Trusts?—No; the farmer, in my opinion, is the most miserably constituted individual in existence. I am speaking from experience. One may help the farmer legitimately to the extent of £500 or £5,000 a year, but ask that same farmer to put up £5 or £10 in proportion and you will not get it. He will be full of excuses—let the other fellow do it. You can only do it by some form of legislation. The farmer is too lethargic, and the Government and Parliament must take the matter up and protect him as they would protect an infant. He cannot protect himself, and therefore, I say, you gentlemen kindly help.

104. *Mr. Witty.*] With regard to the debarred meat that is sent Home, where does it go to—in the open market?—No, it does not go into the open market. If you are nominated to receive it you do what you like with it. You may buy it, but you get no commission, and in that case you pay the market price, whatever that may be, and then sell it for whatever you like. That is for retail purposes. If you want to sell it to anybody else you are restricted—you have to sell it to the established firms, with certain restrictions; but the restrictions disappear when the retailer gets it.

105. Do you mean to say that the meat is tagged here and it goes direct to the agents who are nominated?—That is so, and then they have the right to sell it to themselves or to somebody else already established in the trade.

106. We had it stated in evidence the other day that the nominated meat is pooled, and whilst they get the number of carcasses they do not always get what they have nominated?—They do not get the individual brand. For instance, if you send forward a thousand lambs, they would not get a thousand lambs of Mr. Witty's brand, but the first thousand lambs which came along, and there may be half a dozen brands. In that way the brands only are pooled.

107. You say that some companies are paying a higher price than the legitimate price and then nominating those lambs, and yet other companies, according to your statement, may be getting the lambs which other people may have given a higher price for?—They do not mind whose lambs they are so long as they get them. First-grade lambs are the same wherever you get them from.

108. Then you consider that the Board of Control at Home is a farce?—Absolutely. I have not yet given you the details which will prove that the Committee at Home is a farce.

109. I think you said that Sims, Cooper, and Co. were very large buyers of meat here?—Yes, I think they are the largest in the Dominion.

110. I have figures here which go to show that they only received £360,000 worth of meat which they shipped Home, whilst other companies were getting a far larger amount from the Government out of a total of £6,000,000 or £7,000,000?—Well, of course, those are tricks of the trade. There are more experts than you or I, and they have a clever way of covering up their track of business. You would want to go into the ramifications of every company to find out the true position. I have already mentioned one company to you. They may ship that meat under the name of Sims, Cooper, and Co., but you would require to find out what they put through the London Produce Company, which is owned by Mrs. Sims, Mrs. Cooper, and two others.

111. According to the information I have received they have only obtained that quantity of meat, and yet they are practically the largest buyers in New Zealand?—The only man who can check that is Sir Thomas Robinson, and I have no faith in him. I said at the time that he was the wrong man for the position. He had interests in other directions.

112. Have you any faith in Sir Thomas Mackenzie?—I have a lot of respect for him, but he is not in the position to go against the tide. I and others had a man at Home who was watching these matters, for which he was paid £1,500 a year. When Sir Thomas Mackenzie took office he asked me to allow this man to remain, but I said "No, it is for you to attend to that business now; we have paid £1,500 a year for some time, but we will do it no longer." He then said to me, "You cannot expect me to fight the matter in my official position unless the farmers combine and help me."