

Turning back to the shipping, eighty liners carried our dairy-produce from the Dominion during the last twelve months, sixty-six of them within a period of forty weeks, covering our main dairy season. These latter gave an average of a boat every four or five days. Only on one occasion was there an interval between arrivals at Home as long as thirteen days, and one twelve. There was one period—that was in February—when the ships failed to lift produce—cheese, not butter—in reasonable proportions to quantities available, and that was due to the interests of the lamb-producers in the flush being studied. Had the dairy associations attended to their duty, there is no reason why special boats could not have been obtained for dairy-produce during the flush. The facts are that the shipping was nothing like so short of our desires as has been made to appear for the purpose of gathering support for control. But it is not suggested that there is not room for improvement.

I cannot take up more of your time to go more thoroughly into the matter, because the question is too intricate. The shipping question is a very intricate one indeed, but I have looked through the plans of all the ships, the variety of kinds of space, and the central point is that whilst they could have lifted a great deal more butter in February with the lamb—because you can put butter into a freezing-chamber—the lamb-producers were favoured as against the dairy producers. But the shortage was not great. I have seen the statements of the shipping companies, and have verified them. The applications in February were for 157,000 crates of cheese, and there were 103,000 crates shipped. I will finish this division by saying that the chief fault has lain with the dairy associations: had they asked the shipping companies to put on special boats it could have been arranged. Do you know that never has such an attempt been made until this year, within the last few months. I cannot find any single record in my investigations of any distinct attempt being made with the shipping companies to put on a special line of boats during the flush season.

So far as our investigations go, the weight of evidence is distinctly against regulation so as to secure shipping of equal quantities, and distinctly in favour of undelayed shipments, so as to get our produce, especially cheese, on the market at the earliest possible date after manufacture; and towards this end the proper step would be the making available of special boats for dairy-produce during the flush; and we are satisfied that this can be secured and, with the magnitude of our dairy-produce, reduction in freight can be obtained by ordinary negotiation, and certainly without the passage of arbitrary and unjust legislation. These returns show very complete details as to the vessels, dates of departure, dates of arrival in London, cabled market prices of butter and cheese and of Danish butter, also some actual sales which compare favourably with cabled advices.

We realize that our present dairy associations have not served our purposes as well as they should, but it has not been due to the lack of power, for no factory has withheld from them the complete liberty and power to make shipping arrangements and enter into contracts on their behalf, and, as a matter of fact, they have entered into contracts right up to the one now current.

We are absolutely opposed to control for any purpose, and opposed to an export tax. We suggest, not as an alternative to the control scheme, for we cannot admit that under any circumstances control can be tolerated, but as an improvement on present circumstances, the replacement of the present dairy associations by a Producers Board, to be established as a representative body of all the dairying industry, whom the producers individually, or a factory, or section, or a whole, can use, the Board to have the special function of attending to all matters appertaining to the shipping of produce, but to be debarred from trading. The Board to be elected for a definite term, say three years, all members going out at the end of each term—just as in the case of Parliament and local-government bodies; the seats to be allotted as nearly as can be on basis of production in different districts; all members going out at the end of the term. I have never heard of the Government of a country stopping when the Government went out of office. There should be a direct election by the ballot, and the possibility of turning out the members of the Board “neck and crop” if they do not suit us. A continuous Board is pernicious, and that is the suggestion in the Bill. Such a body, elected by ballot and removable every three years, would without doubt have the confidence of the producers, and no factory would hesitate to properly authorize them to act as their agents in making any arrangements or entering into any contract.

A great number of us have gone into this matter many times and have had many meetings, and this is their confirmed opinion that I am now expressing; but I will keep to the actual wording of the resolution passed by them: “We oppose the whole Bill, but recognize that there is room for improvement in our present system. With that end in view we are unanimously in favour of immediate legislation providing for the constitution of a Producers Board, to be elected by the producers by ballot for the term of three years. The chief function of the Board to be arranging all matters appertaining to the shipping and transit of our dairy-produce for export on behalf of the owners, and constitute an efficient Intelligence Department.”

I thank you, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, for having given me a good deal of your time. I feel I have imposed upon you very much indeed, but I say this in excuse, that we feel this is a matter of vital importance, and that our freedom as subjects of the Empire is threatened. The welfare of the industry is threatened, and we cannot tolerate such proposals as are contained in the Bill, and will not tolerate them. We cannot conceive that Parliament will go on with the measure. That is our conviction, and that is why we are going into the matter as thoroughly as we can—to try to put the matter as fully, as carefully, and as thoroughly as possible, endorsed by actual facts, which we are prepared to stand by.

5. *Mr. Masters.*] You are a farmer, Mr. Maxwell?—Yes.

6. You are actually engaged in farming?—Yes.

7. You realize that the present shipping conditions are not satisfactory?—I do—not completely satisfactory.