

to in my first day's evidence, from which you will notice, from the second paragraph in the letter, dealing with the Imperial instructions regarding the shipment of meat, which I maintain is correct and accurately stated, particularly so as regards the instructions to the freezing company of which I am chairman. The Committee will notice that this paragraph is entirely different to the position as stated in Mr. Findlay's subsequent letter of 13th June as quoted above; and I distinctly say that, so far as my company is concerned, from February to March inclusive we were anxious to ship ewes and lambs, but were prohibited. On one occasion we received a letter from Mr. Triggs, as Controller, authorizing us to ship a small quantity of lamb and ewe mutton, but shortly afterwards, and before any ship had come to Gisborne by which we could make any shipment after the receipt of Mr. Triggs's letter, a letter was received from Mr. Findlay cancelling the permission granted by Mr. Triggs's Department. Consequently the Committee will have two letters addressed to the Minister in Charge showing two different positions regarding Imperial instructions for the shipment of meat, and I asked the Committee to accept as correct the statement in Mr. Findlay's letter of 3rd May, and not of his letter of 13th June. The letter I refer to reads as follows:—

DEAR SIR,—

3rd May, 1917.

Referring to the question of shipment of ewe mutton and lamb by the Poverty Bay Farmers' Meat Company, which was brought before this Committee to-day by Mr. Triggs, the matter has been fully considered, but my Committee regrets its inability to provide space at Gisborne for ewe mutton and lamb.

The Imperial Government desires that a special preference should be given to beef, firstly, and then wether mutton, and instructions received by this Committee from the Imperial authorities in April authorize it to allot space for ewe mutton and lamb where necessary in order to prevent the closing of freezing-works.

The Poverty Bay Farmers' Meat Company has more than sufficient beef and wether mutton in store to fill the allotment already made of it. The freezing-works mentioned are not threatened with a cessation of killing operations, and this Committee regrets it has no option in the case of the Poverty Bay Farmers' Meat Company but to carry out the Imperial Government's wishes that special preference must be given to beef and wether mutton.

With regard to the statement that Wellington freezing companies particularly have shipped a considerable quantity of lamb, this, it may be said, was justified by special circumstances.

I have, &c.,

NEW ZEALAND OVERSEAS SHIPOWNERS COMMITTEE,  
JAMES FINDLAY, Chairman.

The Hon. W. D. S. MacDonald, Minister in Charge,  
Department of Imperial Government Supplies, Wellington.

#### WILLIAM WOOD examined. (No. 12.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a merchant in Christchurch, and head of the firm of William Wood and Co. (Limited).

2. You know the object of setting up this Committee is to inquire into the dealings of the American Meat Trust, and it has been suggested that you might be able to give the Committee some information?—Well, it is a matter that we are all very much interested in. I have been in the meat trade since its inception, and I have done a very considerable business in it one way and another. Whether there is a meat trust or not is for you gentlemen to say when you have heard all the evidence. There are very large operators in the meat trade—in fact, gigantic operators. The principal ones are Armour and Co., Swift and Co., Morris and Co., and others, who are called the "Big Four"; but whether they are in any way combined to act as a trust is a matter for you gentlemen to find out. I have no evidence to give on the matter myself, and neither can I throw any light upon the matter. There are enormous dealers in meat, and those four firms are said to have a capital to the extent of £140,000,000 sterling; but I have not seen any balance-sheet or anything else to show that one firm holds any stock in the other. So far as doing business in New Zealand is concerned, those huge firms can do business with their enormous capital without infringing any of our laws whatever, and there is nothing in New Zealand to prevent them holding a controlling interest in any of our freezing companies. If that were so, in my opinion, it would be a disaster. It would not be very difficult to prevent them holding those shares, but that would not prevent them buying, neither would it be the wish of this community to stop them from buying; they must buy in the cheapest market they can and sell in the dearest, and as far as I can see they are not infringing any of the laws of the business. When I heard this Committee was to be set up I have spoken to many of the local buyers of meat, and I have not been able to find out there is any unfair way in which the Americans buy. Of course, you know that Armour and Co. have come right out in the open. Mr. Kingdon, who represents the company in Australasia, told me himself that he had come straight out into the open, and it was one of the conditions under which he joined the association that their dealings were to be straight out from the shoulder—there was to be no smoke-cloud or anything to hide it. I do not know anything about what the arrangements are of Swift and Co. It is generally supposed that some firms in Christchurch represent them. I tried to sell them some meat, but other people were able to sell better on account of their larger supplies. I think there is possibly some way in which you gentlemen will be able to control and look after the interests of the community. No doubt it could be done in many ways, but so far as the laws of business are concerned, and the laws of our limited-liability companies, there is nothing to prevent those large companies obtaining positions here, and to a certain extent controlling the business if they wanted to. Their large capital would enable them to buy the whole of the meat in New Zealand, which they could do if they gave a farthing per pound more than any one else. They are very large operators, but as to whether their operations are to our detriment or not