

41. Let me take my returns. The "Surrey" took seventy-eight days, the "Devon" seventy-four, and the "Dorset" seventy days?—I think your figures are incorrect.

42. The "Suffolk" took seventy days and the "Buteshire" seventy-six. Those are the days to London, and they will probably be a week longer before they discharge their London cargo and steam round the Channel to the west-coast ports. The average of those days is seventy-three. You make it two days less in the average from your figures?—I have not worked out the average, but the range is from sixty-six to seventy-seven days.

43. Then, accepting this contract as a comparison, do you know the time it takes to go from a New Zealand port to London by the Shaw, Savill, and Albion Company's steamers?—Do you mean the longest, the shortest, or the average time.

44. Take the average?—I know the "Delphic" took fifty-two days; but, as a rule, the slow boats do not carry butter. The faster boats have been known to do the passage, when light and in good trim, in about forty-two days.

45. I have not put the "Delphic" down, because she is not recognised as a butter ship?—She did carry butter.

46. The "Norfolk" took eighty-eight days, but the regular butter steamers leaving Wellington, and which receive no subsidy, get into London on an average for the same months I quoted in forty-four days. Will you admit that?—No; the "Norfolk" was not a contract steamer. The regular butter steamers' longest time is about fifty-two days, and their shortest forty-two days.

47. So that in the contract you have entered upon the difference in the average passages, so far as our experience has gone, is twenty-nine days longer?—You are referring to the fastest of the Shaw-Savill steamers to London.

48. You are quite aware that the same grade of steamers are run by the New Zealand Shipping Company?—I think the Shaw, Savill, and Albion Company's boats are rather the better of the two.

49. But a contract has been taken up on the recommendation of your Department which in its working takes twenty-nine days longer to carry produce to London, apart from the west-coast ports. My impression is that you have picked out the fastest steamers by way of comparison. If you took the ordinary steamers which carry the same class of cargo to London as this company carries to the west-coast ports you would find that fourteen or fifteen days would be a fair average difference in time.

50. I am asking you these questions in reference to butter, which is a very important product in this country. These are fast steamers, I admit, but they carry butter at the same rate of freight and reach the market on an average twenty-nine days earlier than yours?—No, that is not so.

51. You will admit that the New Zealand Shipping Company run alternately fortnightly steamers of the same grade as the Shaw-Savill Company, and in the same trade?—Yes, that is so.

52. And these steamers were in the list submitted in the Shaw-Savill Company's tender, to be employed in this trade?—Speaking from memory, I cannot tell you what steamers they did offer. It is quite true that they offered some of the quick boats, but I find on reference to their offer that they finished up by offering such vessels as the "Rangatira," "Matatua," and "Karamea." These boats take fifty-five to sixty days direct to London, and were included with their good boats. They have five inferior boats to those referred to, which probably are the ones they would have used for the west-coast trade, as they naturally would use their fastest steamers for their passenger trade to London.

53. Well, it would have been open to you to object to the slow steamers?—We could not object after accepting the tender.

54. Before accepting the tender did you not seek to see if the faster steamers would be preferentially employed?—We did not approach the Shaw-Savill Company to ascertain that, as we had in fairness to accept the most satisfactory tender.

55. You did not think it was in the public interest to do so?—It would have been rather improper, would it not? There was their tender. If they intended to use their best steamers they should have said so. It was for them to offer their best tender, and I would not ask them to amend it in any way.

56. You discussed various amendments with the other people. But even if they employed cargo-steamers, on your own statement the time they take is only fifty-five days, as against an average of seventy-three—or, according to you, seventy-one days?—I did not discuss any amendments with other people.

57. Do you not think, considering the important advantage of getting butter into the market in the best condition and in the season, it was advisable to accept that tender by the Shaw-Savill Company?—No; I do not think so. Their tender was the worst for the colony of the three tenders received.

58. How do you get over the fact, considering that upon your admission there is a difference of fifteen days—and as the spring comes on in England supplies come in from Denmark and Russia, when down goes the price of butter, and that fourteen or fifteen days would mean a difference probably of 1d. or 2d. in the price obtained towards the end of the season for our butter—that it was not an important matter to the settlers?—I think that is rather an extreme view to take. I do not think it is so.

59. It is a simple fact, is it not?—I do not think so. There might be occasions—perhaps once in a few years—when a week's delay might make a difference of 1d. per pound in the price of butter.

60. Is not 1d. per pound an important factor in the price of butter?—Yes; and I am naturally desirous to see our producers get the best price possible. On the other hand, you might get an extra 1d. per pound through the butter not arriving there in quicker time.

61. You must recognise the fact that at certain times of the year, before the season comes on, you get a better price for New Zealand butter?—Not necessarily. It depends upon so many conditions.