

33. And that is because more merchandise has come by sea and gone by sea?—Yes, that is natural.

34. *Mr. Weston.*] There is a big difference in the freights on general cargo by sea and rail?—Sea traffic is always recognized as cheaper than rail traffic.

35. With regard to coal, when you first came here were they able to bring in full cargoes of coal by steamer then?—Yes, better than they can do now. The “Putiki” used to come with 250 tons, but the owners refuse to send her now. The “Awahou” could carry 300 tons on a 10 ft. draught, but we can never give her more than 8 ft. now, and she comes with half a load—170 tons. That is not a payable proposition.

36. What happens now, I understand, is that the “Awahou” unloads half her cargo at Wanganui and brings the balance here?—Yes.

37. With 11 ft. or 12 ft. depth on the bar and right through the river, what tonnage could you bring over the bar?—Anything up to 350 tons, and perhaps more. The “Awahou” cannot carry more than 335 tons, but a boat like the “Alexander” could bring about 350 or 370 tons. She used to trade here. The “Himitangi” used to trade here also, but she cannot work the port now. The “Kaitoa” used to work here, but on account of having to reduce the loading the owners refused to send her here at all.

38. Now, with regard to the general conditions of the port since you have been manager of Levin and Co., in what direction has it progressed?—It has not progressed in any direction except in the volume of trade.

39. I am speaking of the depth of water on the bar—the conditions of the port: have they improved or gone back?—They have gone back.

40. What is the future of the port unless something is done—will it be possible to keep on working?—Of course, the conditions fluctuate. Sometimes a flood will give you a big depth, while another flood the following month will possibly spoil the depth and make things worse. If nothing is done the natural consequence will be that the conditions will get worse all the time.

41. They have been getting worse ever since you have been here?—Yes. Unless something is done in the near future the conditions will get worse.

42. I suppose that would have a serious effect upon the town?—Yes, as far as Foxton itself is concerned; but the port serves the district more than it does Foxton. The district extends from Pahiataua to Dannevirke right through to Marton, and covers all the country round Bull's, Rangitikei, Shannon, and Tokomaru.

43. The whole of that district would be affected?—Yes.

44. And I suppose the prosperity of Foxton would not be improved?—No. Of course, the hemp industry is our main asset.

45. *The Chairman.*] Do you export any cheese or butter?—No.

46. Is there none made in the district for export?—Yes, there are factories in the district, but the produce goes by rail.

47. *Mr. Weston.*] You have no cool chambers?—No; it would not pay us to bother about that class of cargo.

48. With regard to the railway, Mr. McVilly told us that about 95 per cent. of the general cargo inwards and outwards in this port was railed either to or from the port?—I think that would be about a fair estimate.

49. *The Chairman.*] I suppose the merchants will get some supplies from Wellington and Palmerston by rail?—Yes, but not much. Of course, we have in view the fact that if the port was dealt with fairly and there is a sufficient draught of water the merchants of Palmerston and Wellington would build stores here, and make this a distributing-centre for the whole district.

50. *Mr. Weston.*] There would be not only your firm but other firms?—Yes.

51. Supposing that happened and the railway lost the freight from Wellington, they would have in place of it the freights from Foxton to the places where it is distributed to?—That is so.

52. So that it would not be a total loss to the railway?—No. You must remember that a truck of cargo coming from Foxton to Palmerston is released two or three days before it is from Wellington to Palmerston.

53. *Mr. Hannay.*] Not if the Railways are doing their duty properly?—We find great delay in getting a truck from Wellington.

54. *Mr. Weston.*] Take your case here, where you have had to ship tow and hemp, what has been your experience when you have had to call upon the railway—have there been delays in transit?—Yes; we have missed quite a number of steamers by having the stuff blocked. Paekakariki was a favourite spot to side-track it.

55. When you have had to send cargo by rail on account of the state of the bar you found it did not get a quick despatch?—We have often found it so.

56. With regard to the working of the port, have the Railway Department met the demands of the port in the way of shed accommodation?—No, that is our main difficulty here. The present goods-shed, I understand, has been in existence for thirty-five years. The traffic has increased to an enormous extent, as the figures show, but the accommodation has not been touched. We have made very strong representations to the Department on many occasions about the difficulties we are under, but nothing has been done.

57. How far back do those representations extend?—One gentleman told me they made representations fifteen years ago.

58. You have been in Levin and Co.'s employ in Wellington?—Yes, for about twenty-one years.

59. To your knowledge were Levin and Co. moving in the matter fifteen years ago?—Yes.

60. And during the last six years you have been here have you been bringing the matter before the Department?—Yes; we have often brought it before the Traffic Manager at Wanganui