

Dealing with our New Zealand shortage of shipping to-day, I think there is every reason for saying that our main shortage is not due to submarining and the exigencies of the war, but to loose control which has allowed a considerable quantity of our New Zealand shipping to be diverted into other trades and channels—and not for Imperial purposes, but apparently for profiteering for the gain of the trust operators. During the early part of the war our Prime Minister made a public statement to the effect that the Imperial authorities had accepted an offer of the shipowners to set up a committee to control the American shipping in conjunction with the Board of Trade in London, and as an offshoot of the London Overseas Committee a Shipowners Committee was appointed to control the freight arrangements in New Zealand, acting under the control of the London Shipowners Committee. In addition to eight representatives of the shipowners on the committee Mr. R. Triggs was appointed to represent the New Zealand Government. If the official data which has been published is considered in conjunction with the workings of our shipping arrangements it will be seen that there is justification for saying that, while there is no real shortage of shipping in consequence of the submarining and exigencies of the war, up to a few months ago since unrestricted submarining has taken effect all the circumstances go to show that the shortage is caused through the loose control of our shipping by the Shipowners Committee, who have allowed a considerable quantity of our shipping to be diverted to Argentine and American trade. It must be borne in mind that our shipping has been short during the whole period of the war, and is not a matter arising during the last few months since unrestricted submarining was adopted. I produce to the Committee copy of a letter I have written to the Hon. Prime Minister in this matter, dated 28th July, 1917, attached to which is a copy of a portion of the London Board of Trade's Committee report dealing with meat, and dated 22nd September, 1916. This report shows to-day that the meat-carrying capacity of the River Plate insulated steamers was 450,000 tons, and that Australasia's insulated tonnage of to-day can carry 520,000 tons. Now, as a matter of fact, last year Australia exported 57,340 and New Zealand 158,123 tons, making a total of 209,466 tons of meat exported from Australasia to the United Kingdom for last year, thus showing that Australasia did not use half her tonnage; and it is interesting to note here the excuse that the Board of Trade's report offers for this. They say, in paragraph 16, "Their [meaning the Australasian] 520,000 tons, however, is largely required for butter, cheese, rabbits, and fruit," so that they only carried 273,000 tons of meat in 1913, and 283,000 tons in 1915, showing a slight gain. The Board of Trade Committee, which controls the freight in conjunction with the Shipowners Committee, do not say we have not used the space because it is required for war purposes, but because we require it for "butter, cheese, rabbits, and fruit." Now, as a matter of fact, only a small portion of butter and cheese has been allowed to go forward, rabbits and fruit, so far as I am aware, being practically prohibited. I would also point out Argentine only exported 240,297 tons of meat to England last year, so apparently they had a lot of surplus tonnage not used. While the conditions referred to show very loose and unsatisfactory control of our shipping in England, there is also justification for complaint of the unfair manner in which the New Zealand Shipowners Committee has handled shipping at this end. I produce particulars of five shipments of meat, showing there was a total of 114,448 carcasses of wether mutton shipped by these boats, and 178,899 carcasses of ewes and lambs, at the time when the freezing-works I represent were refused the right to put either ewes or lambs on to any of the loadings except in the event of not having sufficient wether mutton or beef, or to avoid closing the freezing-works in consequence of the congestion of ewes and lambs. In January we did ship some lambs because we had not sufficient wethers and beef, and exception was immediately taken to this by the Shipowners Committee, as you will see from their letter, copy of which I am producing, dated 11th January, 1917, and also my company's reply, dated 17th January, which explains the position.

In addition the allotment of space for tallow and pelts has been unfairly treated. Some works have been allowed to get large quantities away, while others have only got a proportionately small quantity, and others again have not been allowed to ship any. Tokomaru works in the Gisborne district, it is stated, has not shipped any tallow whatever for last season. It should be borne in mind by the Committee that wether mutton and beef were being specially asked for by the Imperial authorities for military purposes, and it was stated they did not require the ewes and lambs—these were required for the civil population; and it has been officially stated they have used no lambs whatever since the beginning of the war for military purposes. On behalf of the freezing company I represent I had occasion to complain to the chairman of the Shipowners Committee of the treatment we were getting in Gisborne. As I received no satisfaction I placed the whole matter before the Minister in Charge of the Shipping, the Hon. W. D. S. MacDonald, and the Hon. Mr. Myers, who was temporarily in charge while Mr. MacDonald was in Australia, and up to the present no satisfactory explanation has been supplied to us. We have had forwarded to us copy of an interview which took place between the Minister, Mr. MacDonald, and the Shipowners Committee, and also their written explanation in the matter, copies of which I produce. This data supplies no satisfactory explanation, except perhaps that it does emphasize that the control has been unsatisfactory both at this end and at London. You will notice that the explanation that a number of the ships have been diverted from our trade is most unsatisfactory and vague; and the statement at the foot of the New Zealand Shipping Company's report, that a few of the company's steamers have made intermediate trips between New York and England, and New York and France, to fill in time while waiting for the loading-berth, certainly shows unsatisfactory control; and, after referring to one of the Federal Shire Line boats, the "Somerset," which is one of our largest-capacity steamers trading to New Zealand, they dismiss the doings of this ship by simply saying that "It has been trading to New Zealand, but understand now diverted to transatlantic service." They do not say for what purpose or under what instructions, and I suggest these, and many of the others which could be referred to, show both laxity of control and want of knowledge of the doings of these ships.