

Meat Trust is the most serious because of its enormous resources, still it is only a question of time when some other bogey may arise equally as serious. Another thing is that, supposing you scotch the American Meat Trust, are we quite sure that the people who trade on the same lines as Mr. Vestey—who, by the way, I am told sold to Armour and Co. some of the enormous areas of this country which he purchased in Australia—have we any assurance that an English company may not do the same? Therefore it is a tough proposition you have before you, gentlemen. I do not know that I need take up your time any further.

6. *Mr. Scott.*] Do you not think the State could control the meat that is produced here by fixing the price and not interfering any further so far as the freezing-works or the producers were concerned—acting in conjunction with the Imperial authorities at Home?—Yes, I think a great deal is possible if they are acting in concert with those who can assist them elsewhere; but if you ask me whether the Government here can control the meat business by fixing the price here, all I can say is that the Government then becomes a speculator, and would have to withstand the variation in prices which would occur between the buying and the arrival of the meat on the market in London.

7. Would not that be met by the suggestion made by Mr. Millward that there should be a committee to advise the Government?—I do not know how you can hold up the market unless everybody's stuff is under the same control. The great difficulty, and one in connection with which we have no experience, is that our product is a perishable one, and a costly one to hold in the best condition. Mr. Millward referred to 1909. I happened to be in London at the same time. Our frozen meat went down to an unprecedented extent. All kinds of suggestions were made to hold up the price, but it was simply impossible. In that year I do not know what the losses the freezing companies in New Zealand must have made, but I know in our case it was huge. Those who operated upon the London market—the wholesalers—simply broke the prices down. They are out to speculate, and I do not think they have any better consciences in London than we have in New Zealand. We are out to make profits, as we must do, for our shareholders. We do not think very much of the buyer at the other end, and they think nothing of us when they get the opportunity, but that has been the condition of commerce from time immemorial. I do not really see how you are going to upset it. It will be quite a revolution if it is entered upon, and the fate of it I do not think any of us can foretell.

8. *Mr. W. H. Field.*] You agree that the outlook is very serious in this country if this movement is not checked?—I say it is serious now beyond doubt.

9. And it is worth our while to evolve a remedy if we can?—Yes, there is no question about that. I should suppose that, roughly, the presence of speculators of this kind must have cost operators this year a long way over a quarter of a million, and I am satisfied that is a low estimate.

10. You are aware, too, that the American trusts are beginning to operate also in fruit and butter, and endeavour to affect the markets of the world?—I cannot say I am aware of it, but I have heard it on good authority.

11. And you think the first step we should take is to endeavour to acquire the co-operation of other parts of the British Empire, at any rate?—Yes, undoubtedly.

12. With that co-operation you think something might be done?—I think the chances are you would bring into a conference better heads than mine. I do not know what may come of it, but I have a strong impression that so long as the war lasts you will get no assistance of any kind from the Imperial Government. The Imperial Government has to consider what effect it will have upon the American supplier of the moment, who, of course, is the biggest supplier. I do not know whether the Right Hon. Mr. Massey has told you, but I know that cables to London from the Requisitions Committee, of which I am a member, indicated that the Imperial Government, or the Board of Trade, which represents the Government, would do nothing that would in any way affect the arrangements that they had made with South America for the supply of beef. Mr. Millward referred to the arrangement we had with the Government as to frozen meat. He said it is running well so far as the working of the scheme here is concerned. The Imperial Government commandeered all our frozen meat, including lamb. The lamb was not required for military purposes, but was put upon the market in London at a restricted price, supposedly in the interests of the consumer—at least that is what we were informed when the commandeering was arranged—that it was to keep prices fairly low. The prices paid here were good, and somewhat in excess of the hoof value of our stock at the time. Everybody was thoroughly well content with those prices, and when a subsequent offer was made increasing the price for meat it was less warmly received than was expected. The desire was more in the direction of allowing surplus meat (after providing for military wants) to go on the market without any restriction, because the restriction was putting money into the pockets of the South American firms all the time, as they were free to sell without control anything over and above what they had actually sold to the Imperial Government. I do not know that the New Zealand farmers were anxious to get a fraction of the money, and they probably would have been perfectly content to know that this meat being put on the market was making a big profit for the Imperial Government. As it is, New Zealand is indirectly contributing enormously to the carrying-on of the war, and nobody gets any thanks for it. What we are contributing is the profit between what we get and what the consumer has to pay. Of course, that is going into somebody else's pockets first, but all the same the profit is retained in England. Therefore I am of opinion that our aim should be to get the Imperial Government to put all the surplus meat on to the London market without restriction, because the Imperial Government would then get the advantage direct.

13. Would your company be willing to freeze only?—Our company was started to freeze only, and we still call ourselves a farmers' company, notwithstanding the fact that in order to keep our works full we must go on the market too. It would suit us admirably to freeze only on producers' account if we could keep the quantity up, but as we cannot do so, and as it certainly would not pay anybody interested to keep machinery idle, we have to purchase also.