

Mr. G. W. LEADLEY examined. (No. 3.)

*The Chairman*: Your full name, Mr. Leadley?—George William Leadley.

And your address?—Ashburton.

And you represent?—The North Canterbury Farmers' Union.

Will you make a statement?—I have been asked to report the findings of the Dominion Conference of the New Zealand Farmers' Union recently held in this city in regard to this question of the issue or non-issue of a license to Armour and Co. I have here the remits which were sent up from two of the provincial centres, and the resolution which was moved by the delegate from Gisborne and carried in substitution of these remits. I have here the report of the discussion—

It is not necessary to go into all that. Just give us the position briefly?—The resolution as carried is rather a lengthy one, but it briefly is this: the Conference registered its opposition to the business being carried on by Vestey Bros. in the North Island in conjunction with the Nelson works, and in other ways, and also objected to the issue of a license to Armour and Co. Shortly, that was the finding of the Conference. Shall I explain the matter further?

Yes, certainly, if you think it necessary?—Well, I wish to say that I opposed the motion. While I am in duty bound to represent the finding of the Conference, as I happen to occupy the position of Dominion president for the time being, I also wish to state my own personal and individual views on this question, which are that I consider it would be to the advantage of the sheep-growers and sheep-farmers of New Zealand if Armour and Co. were permitted to buy and to export frozen meat. I would like to add to that that I am satisfied, from discussions which have occurred with respect to this matter at numbers of public meetings, and resolutions which have been passed and forwarded to the Canterbury Provincial Executive from the branch meetings, and from conversations I have had with individual farmers—I am satisfied that a very considerable majority of the Canterbury farmers are strongly in favour of the issue of a license to Armour and Co., believing that their interests—the interests of the farmers and the interests of the New Zealand meat trade—are sufficiently protected by the existing law.

Is there anything further you would like to say?—No, sir, there is nothing further. There is no need to elaborate on what I have said. I have made my statement as brief and concise as I could. I am, of course, prepared to answer any questions.

What was the result of the voting at the Dominion Conference you mention?—The result was that it was decided to interview the Prime Minister and submit to him the finding of the Conference on this question.

Did you take a vote?—Yes, we took a vote, and the voting was practically unanimous. I spoke against the resolution myself, but I did not vote against it.

The voting was practically unanimous against the issue of a license?—There were practically no votes against the motion from Gisborne. When the discussion was going on I expressed my opinion in similar terms to what I have just stated, and I adhere to that opinion.

*Hon. Mr. Nosworthy*: Am I right in understanding that at one of the meetings of the Farmers' Union you expressed yourself as being against the Minister having the power of issuing and controlling licenses?—You are under a misapprehension. I have never expressed myself in that way. I am quite in accord with the provisions of the Act.

You are quite satisfied that the legislation which has been passed up to now is absolutely in the best interests of the country?—Yes, sir.

And after granting that you are now prepared to advocate a departure from the attitude which has been taken up by the Government in order to protect the interests of the farmers of the Dominion: you are prepared to license Armour and Co. and thereby possibly open the door for the American Meat Trust?—I do not think so.

Why?—Because they would receive a license only to purchase and export frozen meat. It is not necessary to proceed any further than that.

How are you going to stop them going further?—I am not here to formulate a policy. I think that we should draw the line at the point that we have drawn it.

You are not in favour of monopolizing the meat trade of this country?—I do not think any harm can result from issuing a license to any company or companies who desire to come here and buy our goods in the open market and export them in their own name to any point where they think fit.

In other words, you are prepared to ignore that combine and you are prepared to deal with the Meat Trust or any foreigner?—Yes, as buyers and exporters of fat sheep or lambs. I am not in favour of issuing licenses to kill or build freezing-works *ad libitum*. I think there are sufficient freezing-works in New Zealand already; but that is another matter.

How are you to guarantee the ownership of the freezing-works here now?—You cannot. You cannot prevent people selling their shares.

*Mr. J. R. Hamilton*: I take it that it is your idea to issue licenses from year to year, and if anything is found in the transactions of those who may hold licenses that is to the detriment of the country during that period, your idea is that their licenses should be cancelled?—Yes, at once. If it was proved that they were adopting unfair practices I would not support their having licenses any longer. That is my feeling on the matter.

Your idea is that we want as many markets as we can get this year?—Yes, I am strongly of that opinion. We want competition along legitimate lines so as we can get the full value for our produce.

*Mr. Jennings*: Do I understand you to say that there is a meat trust in New Zealand outside of this so-called Armour and Co.?—I do not know whether we could term them meat trusts, but there have been combinations. As a matter of fact I have suffered from them myself. I know it has occasionally happened even in the open market that buyers divide up lots. I have put fat stock in fairly large lots on the market and I have been surprised at the very little competition. On one particular occasion I put five hundred fat wethers on the market and only one man besides the auctioneer bid for them, and I may say that I did not realize the price I expected. After the sale was effected I had occasion to leave the yards, and when I returned I found that the sheep were being taken away by four different drovers. I would like to say also that a neighbour of mine put in a small line of lambs and they were taken away from the sale in three different lots. That is what I mean when I refer to combinations.