

140. *The Chairman.*] Is it a mistaken conception really due to the telegram that Mr. Seddon sent Home?—Of course, that was not in accordance with my proposal.

141. *Mr. Field.*] If the Government opened shops for the purpose you have mentioned, is there any reason why they should not be conducted on business lines without any chance of swindling or leakage, but in the manner of shops which are run by private persons?—None whatever.

142. You were questioned as to a statement made by the Premier that the prices paid by the consumer in the Old Country were less than the prices paid here, and you read a list showing the prices paid by the consumer in England: does that price-list show the average price paid?—I have chosen that as showing a fair average. I can also show you my own price-list when I traded in Manchester.

143. You called yourself there the New Zealand Produce Store Company?—Yes; and the meat was sold all over the district as New Zealand meat.

144. If those are the average prices our mutton is retailed at, is there not an enormous discrepancy between the prices paid by the consumer there and those paid to the producer here?—I consider there is only a fair business profit made. Of course, it pays well, as I show by my estimates.

145. You said that you are aware that there are English buyers competing for Canterbury mutton. Are you aware whether there are English buyers competing in this province?—I understand there are English buyers all over the colony. I have met them myself. With regard to the profits, I have never said more than this: "The profit derived from the business done in the shops would, at the very least, pay working-expenses, so that the cost of the advertisement for the mutton would be nil." I have never brought forward the profit as an inducement to the Government to take the step now under consideration.

146. With regard to the question of a combination of the companies here, you say the purpose of the combination would be for the obtaining of regular shipments only?—Yes.

147. And you do not think the combination would be for the purpose of fixing prices?—I do not think so. Rather than "combination" I would say "agreement."

148. Before you could arrive at that agreement would it not be necessary that the producer should be a party to it, so that the companies should buy all the mutton?—I think it would be a great advantage if all engaged in the trade could enter into the agreement.

149. Would there not be a difficulty in getting this agreement amongst the producers?—There might be, but in their own interest there should not be.

150. *Mr. Hardy.*] Supposing your scheme set before the Committee to be perfect in every way, would you have recommended it in face of the very high prices being got for our mutton?—Yes; because from all the evidence we can gather I dread the growing trade of the Argentine, and I think we should specialise our meat, and introduce it more directly to the wealthier people at Home.

151. Does it matter to the producer what is done with his meat so long as he gets the price he wants for it?—It would make no difference to him; but I say, Let us do this in order to secure that high price in the future.

152. He has already got that high price, therefore is there any advantage in interfering?—There is an advantage in trying to secure that high price. I have seen our mutton higher and lower in price than it is now.

153. Do you not know that produce is sometimes brought into England at a very high price, and that it is an advantage to get it in at that high price? For instance, when Dutch and Irish butter is put on the market, is it not an advantage to get a large quantity of butter on the market when it is at a high price?—Certainly it is an advantage to get a high price from the producer's point of view.

154. Do you not think that the Government interfering as you propose may have a tendency to prevent the English butcher dealing with our meat in the markets?—I am certain that it will not. It will demonstrate that we are assisting the honest butcher at Home.

155. Does it matter to the butcher so long as he gets a high price for his meat?—Yes; because if you have the fraudulent competition at Home you are defeating the object you have in view—that is, in securing a better class of trade that will be permanent. By the fraudulent trader selling New Zealand meat as English, and River Plate meat as New Zealand, you are at a disadvantage, and you will never get the trade worked up to a payable basis.

156. When we are getting high prices do you not think it wise to let things alone?—I am afraid the prices will not continue as they are at present, and I want to keep them good.

157. *The Chairman.*] But you have been afraid all along—for the last two years?—I have.

158. Two years ago the price was 2½d. per pound?—Yes.

159. And now it is up to 4d. for mutton and 5d. and over for lamb, so that prices have not gone back during the last two years?—Certainly they have.

160. But prices are higher now than two years ago?—That is correct.

161. *Mr. Hogg.*] You referred to depots established for Argentine and Australian mutton in various parts of England. I would like to ask if those depots are the same as the shops you propose to open for the sale of New Zealand mutton?—No; the shops in which Argentine meat is sold are not got up in first-class style. They only cater for the working-classes, and conduct a cheap cutting-trade.

162. Do the Governments of the Australian Colonies undertake the sale of their meat in the way proposed by the New Zealand Government?—Australian meat has not been in the market for some time. The Government do not do so.

163. There are three companies that are solely in charge of the Argentine meat?—Yes.

164. And they have been in existence for a number of years?—Yes, for years. They open shops and retail the mutton in certain districts, and when they build up a trade they send direct shipments to the nearest port available.