

18. *The Chairman.*] I understand you contend that the increased cost of rural land adds nothing to the cost of production?—I cannot see that the increased price of rural land adds one penny to the cost of living.

19. Is it your opinion that the frozen-meat trade and the shipping of New Zealand produce to other markets has had no influence in raising the price of mutton to the consumer?—I do not think it has.

20. Yet it has been stated that mutton could be bought for about 2d. or 3d. a pound before the freezing industry started, and that the price now charged is 5d. and 6d. a pound?—Yes, and there is some cause for that.

21. It is not on account of the high price of land?—No, I am certain it is not. We will take mutton. At the present time the producer is getting very little more for his live sheep than he was getting, say, ten years ago. Take the figures for 1902—prime wethers on the 29th May fetched from 17s. to 19s. 6d.

22. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Is that a fair average for 1902?—I should think it is a fair average. I should say it is a low average. I remember getting up to 25s. for wethers sometimes during that year.

23. What is the present price?—I may say that ewes that same year were 16s. to 18s. 4d.—fat ewes. Take the year 1906: prime wethers were from 17s. to 24s., and ewes from 13s. to 18s. 9d. In 1889 prime wethers were 18s. to 25s., and prime ewes from 11s. 6d. to 14s. 6d.; and in 1912 prime wethers were from 18s. to 25s., and prime ewes from 16s. to 20s. 6d.

24. What would the last item work out at dead-weight after allowing for cost of killing, value of hides, and everything else—what would it work out per pound.? What would the farmer get?—I have not gone closely into that matter, but I may state that on my own farm I have always supplied the married men with meat at a uniform price of 2½d. per pound. I have found no cause to vary that price, because I consider that sheep are worth practically the same money to-day as, say, ten years ago. There is very little difference in the price, although it fluctuates from time to time.

25. You consider that that price paid you?—Yes.

26. *The Chairman.*] At what do you estimate the cost of taking sheep from your farm to town?—2d. a sheep, I think, would cover the cost of taking them to Addington Yards.

27. You think somebody is making money out of it?—I think it is possible that somebody is.

28. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Will we get evidence with regard to the actual cost?—Yes; witnesses will come who are closely connected with the trade. It is far better to have experts to give the actual details.

29. *Mr. Hall.*] For how many years have you supplied your men with meat at 2½d. per pound?—For eleven years, and my father supplied them for twenty years before me. I was a farm labourer for a time, and was supplied at the same price that is being charged to-day.

30. *Mr. Veitch.*] You say it paid you to supply the men with meat at 2½d. Can you give us any idea of the real reason why there is such a difference between the price of the meat which you supply to your men and the price at which the meat is retailed in town?—As I have said, production is being hindered by the fact that farmers are afraid to plant perishable crops. The scarcity of labour throughout the year is preventing production of the commodities of life. For this reason the growing of food-supply which require labour has decreased. I have shown that from the official return which I have quoted.

31. *The Chairman.*] Here is a book of "Labour Laws" which contains the labour legislation which has been passed. Which particular Act has prevented the growing of the grain which you speak of?—There is no particular Act, but it is the trend of our legislation—or we would call it the trend of affairs, if you like—which is preventing or hindering labour from coming into the rural districts. Labour is aggregating in the towns. There is one reason which I can give why labour is aggregating in the town, and that is that the workers' homes have been built in the distributing-area of the city instead of in the producing-area.

32. *Mr. Macdonald.*] The falling-off in the acreage of crops has not been in wheat?—No, I have taken the general figures, including grain, barley, oats, and wheat.

33. The land under cultivation in wheat requires just as much labour as other grains?—Yes. The general amount of grain grown in this country has decreased, as I have shown, by 168,020 acres.

34. Can you give us an explanation why the land under cultivation in wheat has actually increased, and not fallen off?—When wheat rises to 4s. 6d. a bushel farmers would plant it. I say that there has been no labour legislation which will stimulate the production of these foods. We should stimulate the production of the food-supply, and then the cost of living would be cheaper.

35. *The Chairman.*] Some of this land has gone out of occupation for cropping owing to the fact that dairy-farming has been more productive than crop-growing?—To a large extent that is so, but I should think that those two should go along side by side, and I think that would be so if there were more workers in the country than in town districts. The more producers we can get the more is that likely to stimulate an oversupply of these products.

36. *Mr. Veitch.*] In regard to workers' homes, have you any idea of how many workers' homes have been built in New Zealand?—In my opinion, the State in assisting to build workers' homes in the city has done a very good thing, but it would have done a great deal better if the homes had been built in the producing-area instead of in the distributing-area. There has been no scheme for building workers' homes in rural districts.