

113. Is Sir Thomas Mackenzie interested in any of the meat companies?—That I cannot answer.

114. You think the small amount of meat received by Sims, Cooper, and Co. is fictitious?—Yes, I think they have got a quantity of meat through other channels. Sims, Cooper, and Co. do not want the meat at Home—they are not retailers. The Australian report says that the bulk of the meat they purchased went to Swift and Co.

115. Do you think it would be very difficult to find out what they do ship?—No; you could find out from the records of the various freezing-works in the Dominion.

116. And then subsequently find out to whom it was nominated?—Yes. You want to get a return from every freezing company showing who were the owners of the meat when shipped, who were nominated to receive it at the other end, and you can then form your own opinion. I will venture to say that you will find from the various freezing-works different persons have been nominated to receive Sims, Cooper, and Co.'s meat.

117. *Mr. Forbes.*] You have been connected with the agitation in connection with the meat trade for some years?—Yes.

118. And I suppose you have aroused a good deal of opposition in connection with your crusade?—Yes, and I have been attacked very bitterly; but I can say this, that no man in the shipping trade or the meat trade has attacked me in public. I have challenged them to do so, but they dare not. I supplied every leading firm in London with a copy of the report I made before it was published or before anything was done here. I asked them for a criticism of the report, and in only one instance was exception taken to it; but at the request of that firm the letters between us were not published, and they have been withheld up to this moment. I may tell you that I have discussed the matter with pretty well all the leading men in the meat trade at Home, men such as Sir Montague Nelson, Weddell and Co., Fletcher and Co., Borthwick and Co., and other leading men.

119. You say in your report that we want to get ready now to handle this question, but some of the measures you have suggested are merely temporary—you suggest that we may require to do something later on in a different way?—Yes.

120. You have not gone into a comprehensive scheme of remedying the whole trouble?—Yes, I think I have; but in any scheme like this you cannot altogether see the future in every detail.

121. The position you take up is this: that the meat will have to be controlled from the producer to the consumer?—That is so.

122. You believe it is better done by State regulation?—Eliminate all middlemen.

123. You are favourable to State ownership?—No, but State control.

124. Not a continuation of the present system of buying meat on the hooks?—No.

125. You do not think that is workable?—While the war is on it is, because the Imperial authorities want portion of the meat for the troops.

126. How are you going to keep out the trust if you are not prepared to get some one to take over the ownership of the meat?—First of all eliminate their influence and control in the shipping which carries our produce. That is the first stepping-stone, and then control your produce.

127. To what extent?—Direct to the retailer.

128. Supposing you fix up the shipping, and the Meat Trust comes here and is prepared to give a higher price for our meat than what we can get from the ordinary firm, how would you deal with that position?—Deal with it by legislation—by providing that nobody is allowed to sell to those firms who are not licensed to buy. That would be for the Government to do in order to protect the country.

129. Can you not see a great deal of difficulty in regard to passing legislation to say that the farmer shall not accept a higher price from certain firms?—There is a difficulty, of course, but it is a question of the lesser of two great evils. It is possible for the trust to dominate our commercial interests in this matter, which would be worse.

130. That is all right; but the other question, of the State taking over the meat-control and handling it, as compared with passing legislation preventing the farmer from accepting higher prices, which do you think would be the easier to manage?—I should think the easier to manage would be for the State to take it up.

131. On the lines on which they are taking it up at the present time?—Yes; but the trust influence at the other end may become dangerous again.

132. You said the American meat people have said that it is absolutely necessary to get the lamb and mutton if they are going to expand their business any further than what it is?—Yes, that is so; they could not open another shop or take more customers because their supplies have already gone.

133. The position is that the trust is absolutely under the necessity of getting our lamb?—Yes, to enable them to expand further in England.

134. Is not that what we are aiming at, to get the highest possible price for our produce?—No, not if it is going to kill our main industry afterwards.

135. I do not mean temporarily, but the highest price over a period of years—a permanent high price?—Naturally that is our goal, but in fighting for that goal we must not allow our industry to be crippled. I think you might take a lesson from the action of the Fruitgrowers' Association in Australia. They say, "We will not accept the highest price; we will say what we think is a fair price, and let it go at that"; and if you offered them £5 a ton more they would not take it, because they consider it is in the interests of their industry not to accept the high prices which may be offered, but to keep up a steady regular business.