

WEDNESDAY, 29TH AUGUST, 1917.

MELDRUM ALFRED ELLIOT further examined. (No. 15.)

1. *The Chairman.*] The Committee understand that you desire to add to your previous evidence?—Yes. I desire to place before the Committee a copy of a letter from Mr. Gilbert Anderson, London, published in the *Manawatu Daily Times* of 28th August, 1917, which deals with the question of the American trust and the British farmer. It reads,—

EXPLOITATION.—WHO ARE THE CULPRITS?—AMERICAN TRUST AND BRITISH FARMER.

This letter, received by a Palmerston business firm, is an eye-opener that he who runs may read:—

The following are the Smithfield market-prices for the months of June, 1917, June, 1916, June, 1915, and June 1914:—

	June, 1917.	June, 1916.	June, 1915.	June, 1914.
Home-grown—	d. d.	d. d.	d. d.	d. d.
Beef, sides	14½-16½	10½-12¼	9½-11	6-7½
Mutton, wethers	15-18	10½-13½	8½-11	7-8½
Mutton, ewes	11-14	9½-10	6½-8	6½-7½
Lamb	16-19	12-13½	10-11	9-10
Frozen—				
New Zealand wethers		8½	7-7½	3½-4½
Australian wethers		8½	6½	3½-3½
South American wethers	10	10-10½	7	3½
Lamb, New Zealand	10	9½	8½	6-6½
Lamb, Australian	10	9½	8	5½-5½
Lamb, South American	11	11-11½	7½	5½-5½
Chilled—				
Beef, fores	11	8½	7½	3½
Beef, hinds	14½	9½	8½	5

From the above it will be seen that the price of home-grown British meat has advanced in price over 100 per cent., and that the prices of South American chilled beef have increased threefold. No attempt has been made by the Government to control or regulate those prices.

All the Australian and New Zealand beef and wether mutton is taken to supply the Army. The British Government have entered into contracts with the South American freezing-companies to supply all the frozen beef to the armies of Britain, France, and Italy, along with a certain proportion of mutton. This makes it perfectly clear that but for the supplies of frozen beef and mutton from Australia, New Zealand, and America, the Army and Navy could not have been kept in the field, and the British farmer has contributed nothing in this respect.

All the supplies of frozen meat in Australia and New Zealand have been commandeered by the respective Governments and sold to the Imperial authorities. Only a small percentage of this meat is available to the public—namely, lamb, and probably 10 per cent. of the mutton which are ewes.

In normal times Great Britain supplies 60 per cent. of the meat, but at the present time 68 per cent.: Australia 6 per cent., New Zealand nearly 9 per cent., and South America 16 per cent., as compared with the total British production. 365,648 tons of frozen meat was shipped direct to Continental ports. Australian and New Zealand mutton and lamb available for the public is only 67,490 tons, or 3½ per cent. of the total.

It is further to be noted that the price at which the New Zealand and Australian meat has been taken over by the Government is only comparatively a slight advance on pre-war prices, and the Army is being supplied by meat at a comparatively low price.

Contrary to the statements in the paper by Lord Incheape and Mr. Frank H. Houlder, the shipping companies have been allowed to advance their freight charges by 50 to 75 per cent. Owing to labour difficulties and advance in wages, port refrigerated storage has advanced from 25 to 40 per cent. Over 75 per cent. of the meat mentioned in Lord Incheape and Mr. Houlder's letter goes to supply the Army.

Farmers and distributors of the home-grown meat in Great Britain have taken full advantage of the absence of frozen meat-supplies and have raised their prices, as stated, to over 100 per cent. Chilled beef and meat in the hands of foreign firms has remained uncontrolled, and has followed the price of home-grown.

British firms handling frozen meat have had their supplies seriously reduced, while they have been compelled to sell the reduced quantities at prices fixed by the Government at a pre-war rate of commission, while the quantity under their control is considerably less than 75 per cent. of pre-war conditions. It is therefore perfectly clear that there is no profiteering and no control of the market by the British firms.

The present position shows the advantages that have accrued to the public in the past from the control of the frozen-meat trade in the hands of the British public, and that the withdrawal of these supplies to feed the Army left supplies of home-grown and foreign meat uncontrolled with a consequent extravagant rise in price.

The remedy—judging from past experience—is the placing on the market at the earliest possible date the largest quantity of frozen meat that can be spared after a full consideration of the Army requirements, and the placing of maximum prices on home-grown and foreign meat.

ROBERT BUCHANAN BENNETT examined. (No. 16.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What position do you hold?—I represent Messrs. Henry S. Fitters and Sons, London, meat-salesmen.

2. You know that the object in setting up this Committee is to inquire into the operations of the Meat Trust here and at Home?—Yes.

3. Would you desire to make any general statement in the first instance?—I do not know that I can make any general statement, except that we all know the Meat Trust is at work, but if you wish me to say I know anything as to their particular operations I have no knowledge on the subject. We have no documentary evidence to support what we hear. You can only go by observations of some years and to a large extent upon hearsay. In my own particular business I represent a firm of meat-salesmen on the Smithfield Market, and we have not been buying any meat—we have gone on the consignment business. The trust has come along in the guise of a buyer or speculator and has bought on the spot, and as such interferes with my particular business. I know that this has been done, because when I have gone to clients they have told me that So-and-so came along and bought them out. When the English Government commandeered the meat there was a scheme whereby the growers could put their meat into a freezing company and they could nominate the Board of Trade to deal with the surplus. There has been no surplus of beef or mutton. That was all right so long as the meat was sent Home, but the nomination was a farce. I cannot prove these things, but I know my business has gone down considerably.