

Some day the people of this country are going to get tired of fooling with it. When they get tired, God help the Meat Trust! Nobody else will.

Mr. James J. Hill had in his mind a smattering of this fact when he said that if the cost of living should continue to increase this nation would be destroyed by revolution. The Reverend Joseph Parker put the same truth in crisper form when he said that "the other side of every ballot-box is a cartridge-box." People eventually become tired of voting for a thing and never getting it.

Mr. Armour's meat trust has so many times been enjoined, "destroyed," and judicially hamstrung under the anti-trust laws that it might even seem as if it should be unable even to lead a lamb to the slaughter. Yet, see how it puts the screws to this nation.

#### Why the Meat Trust Exports at Low Prices

In 1906, when the Meat Trust was trying to justify increasingly high prices here at home by alleging a shortage of supply, its export of meat reached the top-notch of all American history—the colossal figure of 733,000,000 pounds.

Roll these figures around in your mind and ask yourself if there was any real shortage of meat supply in this country that year. It is impudent lying to say there was. There was only a shortage of American citizens who were able to pay the trust prices for meat.

And last year, when the prices for meat here at home were higher than ever—and considerably higher than the prices of American meat in London—the trust exported 419,000,000 pounds. If this meat had been kept at home where it had been raised, there would have been twenty-five pounds more for each American family of five. But to have thrown it on the home market would have decreased prices, and the trust preferred to export it for less than it charged at home and maintain extortionate prices on the vastly greater quantity consumed in this country. It is a business axiom that the price of a commodity is fixed by the price of the surplus, and the Meat Trust takes very good care that its surplus shall never be sold here at home at low prices. It is either kept off the market by piling it in cold storage or exported.

There is not the slightest reason for doubting that this country is and long has been producing all the beef cattle that the Meat Trust wants produced. The trust is taking a course that can lead only to the conclusion that it believes the present production gives it the maximum return upon its investment. The trust knows well enough how to increase or decrease production, when it wants to. At the present moment it is trying to increase production of hogs by paying farmers high prices for hogs. In 1907, when hogs were too plentiful to be the most profitable to the trust, it discouraged hog birth by cutting the prices it paid for hogs. Farmers disposed of their breeding sows because prices were so low. Secretary Wilson said so in his last annual report. And hogs became less numerous, precisely as the trust wanted them so.

Put it down in your memory now—there will be a big crop of hogs this year. And when the crop is ready for market the price of hogs will go down, while the price of pork will stay up. The surplus will go into cold storage or be exported, in order to maintain the domestic price of pork.

It is therefore false to charge and stupid to believe that the supply of beef cattle is any shorter than the Meat Trust wants it to be. Any time the trust wants more cattle produced, it will signify its desire by increasing the prices that it pays for cattle on the hoof. At the present moment "the farmer's raw cattle," as Secretary Wilson said in his last report, "are barely as valuable as they were nine or fourteen years ago."

If the Meat Trust is not in fact a gigantic plundering corporation, intent only upon securing the maximum profit, without regard to the consequences to others, why does it not stimulate with higher prices the production of cattle, if there is, as it says, a shortage? And why doesn't it stop exporting its surplus for less than it charges at home, and sell its whole product in this country at the same reduced prices at which it sells its exports?

A shortage in the supply of meat? Look over my shoulder while I peruse a transcribed page from the Ice and Refrigerator Blue Book, and see for yourself

what was in cold storage at the height of the meat boycott last winter. This little book is not in the public libraries nor in the book stores. It is printed only for private circulation among cold-storage men, but some patriotic traitor gave a newspaper man a look at it last winter. This is what was held in the 538 cold-storage plants at the time when meat was supposed to be so scarce that prices seemed to have dynamite under them:

Fourteen million cattle.  
Six million calves.  
Fifty million hogs.  
Twenty-five million sheep and lambs.  
One billion eight hundred million eggs.  
(Yes, indeed the Meat Trust handles eggs, and poultry too, besides butter, cheese, and a number of other things.)  
One hundred and thirty million pounds of poultry.  
Fifty million dollars' worth of fruit.  
One hundred million dollars' worth of butter and cheese.  
Untold millions of pounds of potatoes and vegetables.

A scarcity of food in this lovely country of ours? Get Mr. Sweeney on the wire and tell it to him. There is a scarcity of men in the food business who are not robbers; that's all.

#### Where the Retailers Enter

And that brings us to our dear old friends, the jobbers and the retailers. Don't think they are standing around with their hands in their pockets while this carnival of robbery is going on. They are not. They are flying around putting their hands into everybody else's pockets. The jobbers, for the most part, are getting away with the goods. That is,

As a business man he becomes a tenant. As a tenant he increases the demand for and decreases the supply of business property.

That's the landlord's cue to get busy. Noting the increased demand for business property, he increases the rent. With his little landlord sponge he sops up most of the extortion profits of prosperity. He doesn't take all, but he takes almost all. He not only skims the cream but takes part of the blue milk. He leaves the ambitious clerk who becomes a proprietor almost ready to wonder why he left his happy clerkship.

But that isn't the worst of the situation. The worst of the situation is that rents once increased seldom come down. Landlords refuse to form the habit of decreasing rents. Confirm this statement by inquiring in any community where even ephemeral "prosperity" has increased the rental of business property.

Inquire in Paris, where for years after the Exposition of 1900, small merchants cried aloud because rents that had been increased only for the moment were kept up after the moment had passed, and have never come down. Inquire in Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo—anywhere you please. Wherever you inquire, you will find that prosperity has never increased business property rents, except to have the landlords maintain them for evermore.

The landlords simply hold out for what they want. They want all the tenants are able to pay, even when they are gouging the public the most. And if the tenants want to remain in business, which of course they do, they must keep on gouging, even though they know they must give up most of their plunder to the landlords.



A Bunch of Grain Growers

they are profiting from their plunder. The retailers are not. They are profiting little, if any. They no sooner get an extortionate dollar than their landlords take it away from them. High rents and the costs of excessive competition are eating up the retailers. Many a little store in New York was rented for \$1,000 a year, fifteen years ago, is now rented for \$3,000 a year. All over the country rents have gone up.

And they have gone up for a very simple reason. Prosperity—that's the polite word. Plunder—that's the fact word, orgy of high prices that began with the first McKinley administration set the ball rolling. Retailers saw how easy it was for the trusts to whoop up prices. The retailers caught the fever. They began to whoop up their own prices. If the trust advanced a nickel, they advanced a dime, or a quarter. If customers complained, they extended sympathy and the explanation that the trusts were to blame.

This would have been fine business for the retailers if the landlords had not heard of it. Unfortunately for the retailers, the landlords did hear of it. Trust the landlords to find out when their tenants are making too much money. They find out very quickly. People come and tell them. Not in so many words, but in this fashion:

Every bright clerk in a store that is making too much money becomes ambitious. He is no longer satisfied to be a clerk. He wants to be a proprietor. The loot looks better to him than his wages. He scurries around to get the money with which to get into business.

Figure it out some other way if you want to. I have figured it out my way. If your way is not my way and you are quite sure your way is right, perhaps you would do well to go into the retail meat and grocery business. If, indeed, the landlord be not plundering the retail provisioner of his plunder, there is great money in the meat and grocery business. Secretary Wilson, in his last annual report, said that an investigation of market prices in fifty cities showed the average retail price of meat to be 38 per cent. more than the retailers paid the packers.

That should be good news for the man who wants to go into the retail meat business, and does not believe the landlord will rob him. More good news is apparently contained in the fact that the retailer's profit on almost everything in the line of groceries is greater than the retailer's profit on meat.

Of course, all is not net profit that the retail grocer or meat dealer receives in excess of what he paid for an article. The retailer must occasionally pay his clerks, as he must also bear the cost of drivers, horses, and delivery wagons. But he had all of these expenses before retail prices were increased.

Make no mistake—the retailer's gross income from a given investment is vastly greater than it used to be, while his expenses, aside from rent, have not increased in proportion. Either the retailer is pocketing this increased sum or he is not. If he is pocketing it, nothing except the robbing of express trains in a gold-mining country is so profitable as the retail provision business. If he is not pocketing it, who is? The people

are paying it and somebody is getting it. Who looks more guilty than the landlord? Everybody knows that the retailer of provisions is not rolling in wealth. Here and there, in aristocratic neighborhoods, retailers are accumulating riches. The average retailer is not. He is making little, if any, more than a living. His landlord and the jobbers take care of most of the money he takes in.

#### The Jobber's Part

Next to the trusts and the landlords the jobber is the millstone upon the neck of the provision trade. Of these the jobbers who deal in fruits, vegetables and eggs are the worst. The farmer knows them as "commission merchants." With honorable exceptions, who usually go broke under dishonest competition, a commission merchant is a cross between a man-eating tiger and an eel. He has been known to steal whole consignments of produce. He is frequently suspected of stealing something. If he handles produce on commission, the farmer always has to take his word for it that he sold the commission for the amount he said he did, though the producer has no proof and suspects the statement to be untrue. And if the jobber buys outright he pays the farmer next to nothing.

New York people wonder, when the retail price of apples is almost prohibitively high, why apples rot on the ground in the fall within seventy-five miles of New York. They wonder, too, when the retail prices of vegetables are so high, why every farmer doesn't engage exclusively in the raising of vegetables. The residents of every city are similarly perplexed. Here is the reason in this letter from a New York farmer to a New York newspaper:

"I have had the actual experience of being a producer and know the bitterness of, say, shipping peaches to New York market for which the consumer paid 5, and often 10 cents each in the fashionable districts (equal to from \$4 to \$8 a box) and for which I have received 37 cents a box. I have shipped as fine string beans as any fastidious housekeeper could wish to see, fresh, tender, and delicious, for which I was paid 12½ cents a bushel, and the consumer would be taxed anywhere from 10 to 25 cents a quart, equal to from \$3.20 to \$8 a bushel. I was paid one quarter more for one bushel of thirty-two quarts than the consumer paid for the cost of one quart. It can be easily figured even by the layman that this price did not pay me for the basket, freight, and hauling, leaving out the cost of labor, of plowing, harrowing, cultivating and picking.

"I could give instances of the insatiable greed of that great oppressor, the middleman, but to what advantage? These facts would not soften his heart."

Why should a farmer become excited about the raising of fruits and vegetables, when he knows that he will be able to get next to nothing for them after they are raised? Why should a commission merchant pay more than he is paying when experience has taught him that he can employ all of his capital, and make the maximum profit upon it, while paying what he now pays? What does he care if the city people are compelled to go without apples when apples are rotting

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