

Mr. B. E. H. TRIPP examined. (No. 1.)

*Mr. Tripp:* I think that the pastoral tenants ought to be given a straight-out extension of fourteen years, to help them recover the loss sustained through the snow last winter. That would encourage the people to improve their country and to save hay. And the extension ought to be given to any one—not just according to the number of sheep lost. I mean that the man who has lost the greatest number of sheep should not have the greatest extension; because I know of a number of men who went to a lot of expense before in saving hay and getting their sheep out, and who in consequence saved a lot of them. If relief were given just according to the number of sheep lost on each place the man who had gone to the expense of saving hay, and so on—well, it would be against him, as it were.

1. *Hon. Sir W. J. Steward.*] Would you be good enough to state the grounds of the application—what has happened with regard to the loss of sheep, and so on?—Of course, the loss has been very heavy on most of the hill country in Canterbury. I could not tell you the exact number of sheep lost in each case.

2. The snowstorm occurred last July twelvemonths?—Yes, in 1903.

3. I think the petition shows a loss of something like 217,000 sheep?—Yes, that is the number given in the petition.

4. Then, besides the number of sheep that were destroyed and the loss on them, there was the consequent loss of wool?—Yes. The loss in pounds sterling would be something like £217,000; the direct loss would be about £1 per sheep.

5. The petition gave the losses as affecting some twenty-three petitioners, I think. There are a great many other persons in the same position, are there not?—There are a great many people that the petition did not have time to go round to. I myself only got the petition a few weeks before it came up to Wellington. It was then being sent to the back country, and, as the mails would be going only, perhaps, once a week, it would not have time to get round to half the number of people who had suffered losses. I should think the number of sheep lost would be probably something like 400,000, and they would be worth £400,000.

6. And then, of course, losses were sustained not only by the pastoral tenants—that is to say, the lessees of the large runs—but also by the holders of small grazing-runs and the holders of smaller properties?—Yes; there may have been some sheep lost in other places, but I think you will find most of the losses took place on the pastoral runs, because it is the highest country. On the freehold country and the small grazing-runs the people were better able to get to the sheep and save them. I think the bulk of the losses would be on the high country.

7. Then, there was the effect on the lambing—there were less lambs?—Yes. The number of sheep decreased very much, and you might say that half of those lost would be ewes. Probably there would be about a hundred and fifty thousand or two hundred thousand less lambs in that part of the country.

8. So that altogether the loss on account of the snow would not be very far short of half a million?—I should think half a million would not be too large a sum to place it at all.

9. Well, now, it is in consequence of this great loss that you ask for some remedy?—Yes.

10. And the remedy asked is as stated by you in your opening remarks?—Yes. An extension of lease would give people time to recover their losses.

11. Of course you are aware that there is a great demand for the cutting-up of land in the country, and also that it may be—though I do not know that such is the case—that some of the pastoral runs would be suitable for subdivision?—Yes.

12. That being so, would you suggest or ask that there should be a definite agreement to extend the leases of all, or simply to extend the leases of the holders of those runs which are not required for closer settlement?—I should think the fair thing would be to extend the leases of the whole lot, because it would not be fair to a man who had had a big loss to take away his run for cutting-up purposes in a year's time.

13. I mention that because there has been some correspondence in the newspapers about the matter?—Yes; I have seen something about it. It would be unfair to a man who had had a big loss to take his run from him straight away and give him no compensation.

14. That is not the point I want to get at. In the first instance you asked for a general agreement to extend to the leases. That would have to be done by legislation, I suppose, and it would be necessary to take these other matters into consideration?—Yes, of course, it would be a point that would have to be considered.

15. Then, have you anything to say with regard to the conditions of the suggested new leases—as regards improvements or otherwise?—I think the holders ought to be encouraged to improve the country, and if they had fresh leases I fancy they would do it, because we have seen during this last winter that people who saved hay saved a tremendous number of sheep. I believe I saved five thousand sheep by saving hay.

16. I mean as to sowing down with grass, surface-sowing, and so on?—People ought to be encouraged to surface-sow grass-seed.

17. What do you mean by “ought to be encouraged”?—They ought to be given compensation.

18. That is to say, it should count as an improvement for which they would obtain valuation: is that what you mean?—It should count as an improvement.

19. It does not now?—The only improvements now are, I think, fencing and buildings, and the valuation is not to exceed three times the annual rent. There is no encouragement to do anything else.

20. Have you anything you wish to add to your statement?—As I said before, I think an extension of lease ought to be given for fourteen years, and I gave my reason for the extension applying all round. One man that I know of went to big expense in saving his sheep last winter.