

Meat inspection- theory and reality

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Meat Inspection- Theory and Reality The meat packing industry in America involves slaughtering, processing, packaging and distributing livestock products such as beef (Lawrence 5). It is very important to review the history of this industry in America and in deed the whole world because the accounts and stories about the meat packing and inspection industry within the public domain, especially in the 19th century up to the early 20th century are against the marketing theory of free market regulation. It is also significant to understand some of the less discussed issues in the industry such as the monopolistic practices of the big companies in the industry commonly referred to as the ' Big Four' (Lawrence 11). Historical accounts about the industry state that the industry was left unregulated before the Federal meat inspection Act was passed in Congress. This led to unsanitary conditions in the industry that made the public vulnerable to diseases. Upton Sinclair, a writer from The Appeal to Reason, in his book The Jungle, created awareness in the public regarding the state of affairs in the meat packing and inspection industry. The public, becoming aware of the conditions in the meat packing industry, urged President Theodore Roosevelt to pass legislation to allow for inspection of meat in the industry. This upset a majority of the meat packers who fought against the legislation. The disgusting picture of the meat packing industry was confirmed by the Neil-Reynolds Report, which reaffirmed the need to put in place meat inspection regulation as well as regulating the whole meat packing industry, which had failed to control itself internally. A clear examination of the facts about this industry which are in public domain reveals a number of factual discrepancies and mistakes that these historical accounts make (Lawrence 23). Contrary to historical accounts, the meat packaging industry was not

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unregulated. By the time Sinclair wrote his book, the industry had been regulated for over ten years. The Meat Inspection Act had been passed in 1891, after allegations about contaminated meat being sold to the public emerged. There is no evidence however to support the claim that the legislation came as a result of tainted meat. This legislation was mainly passed due to the changing economical conditions in 1891. This was because of the emergence of four big firms in Chicago with the introduction of refrigeration. These firms controlled about 90% of the industry and greatly altered the supply and demand of livestock products (Lawrence 27). There were concerns about prices of cattle falling down, due to the increased demand. This called for regulation to stabilize the industry. Allegations of unsanitary conditions in the meat packing industry revealed in Sinclair's book are in fact not true. This book was a fictional novel and even though fictional novels can reveal truths about the society, this one in this case does not. A report by the Bureau of Animal Industry in 1906 refuted Sinclair's claims about unsanitary conditions. Accusations made by the Neil- Reynolds report also seem not to hold as they did not have experience and knowledge of how the meat packing industry operated at the time. Their main aim of going to inspect the Chicago facilities was to identify faults so as to enable them pass the legislation. As noted within the public also that the big four firms in the industry were unhappy with the new legislation, it turns out that the firms were indeed supportive of the new piece of legislation. At a meeting with the government before the bill was passed, the big four firms applauded the regulations and termed it as a ' wise law' that had to be enforced. Works Cited Lawrence W. Reed. Ideas and Consequences: Of Meat and Myth. The Freeman, Volume 44. Issue 11, 2011.

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