

have no intention of selling the remaining 18,293 dinners for human use if there is any question of their safety or wholesomeness.

Also, we have requested Continental not to dispose of any of these dinners until Department microbiologists have had an opportunity to conduct examinations and tests. Continental has agreed to this request.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. Are you aware that on the container in which the dinners were sold it says "U.S. Inspected and Passed by Department of Agriculture, EST233A"?

Now, there was a rejection here and you say for some reason your people didn't know anything about it.

Dr. MEHREN. At that time, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Agriculture had no authority and no responsibility for the cleanliness, wholesomeness, or any other attribute of any product once it had been passed in the Federal Establishment.

Since the passage of the Wholesome Meat Act, which was made effective a couple of months ago, we do have the responsibility now for surveillance, seizure, detention.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. The question I raise is this: Obviously, you did inspect and approve these dinners and DSA didn't approve them. In other words, there was a difference of opinion between two Federal agencies.

Dr. MEHREN. Yes; obviously, nor did they advise us of this. This could quite conceivably have occurred—and we don't know yet what did occur—but it could have occurred through contamination in the process of transit from the shipping dock of the inspected plant to whatever receiving area was used by the Continental people.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. You say that they still have in their possession some 14,000 dinners. Are you aware of the bacteria count that was obtained from laboratory tests on these dinners?

Dr. MEHREN. Yes; I am aware of those which DSA later reported to us. I have the numbers, very high, as I recall, $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2.7 million plate count, which is vastly high.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. We showed that to Dr. Goddard yesterday and he said that he, under no conditions, would want humans to consume these dinners.

Dr. MEHREN. As a layman, I would concur fully in his judgment.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. As of now, have you requested Continental or Morton to hold these dinners and not to further dispose of them in any fashion.

Dr. MEHREN. Yes; as a matter of fact, we got this information, which I have transmitted to you now, last night and the request has been made that the remaining 18-odd thousand be held, and the Continental people have concurred.

Now that we know the details, our microbiologist will be there.

Mr. ROSENTHAL. I want you to understand one thing: Our interest is not the specifics of any case but the procedures and mechanism under which the Government operates.

Why do these things happen? Why is there a breakdown in communications between agencies?

Going back to this specific case, if they were frozen when they left the plant, the microbiological organisms wouldn't be growing during the frozen process.