

the different qualities of mutton; and to show you how keen they are to get this mutton into the market, you find here, wether-legs, ten in crate, 4½d.—that is, made up in order that ten families may get a crate and have a leg each; and other crates are made up similarly for shoulders, loins, &c., and the prices are given for the week. This is to show you what these people are doing for the distribution and forcing of our meat into the markets. Then, again, we have to come to the question of supply. Now, between January, 1909, and July, 1909, what do we find? We find that New Zealand sent in nearly two million carcasses—one million of wethers and one million of lambs—in excess of what she sent before. When I was at Home the freezing-people and people handling mutton came to me about getting information as to New Zealand, and they said they were told that the supplies of lamb would be half a million short. Instead of this we find the supply half a million in excess; therefore they were a million out. What Board can possibly undertake the control of our supply? It is very difficult for sheep-farmers to say what they are going to supply; you cannot tell from month to month how your lambs are going to fatten. You may have heavy rains which affect the matter one way. On the other hand, you have dry weather, and a large excess of lambs. How are you going to control that? Are you going to say, "This month we shall ship so-many carcasses of sheep and lambs?" You may have thousands of carcasses behind you for which to find a market. You lose your chance if you do not get sold before August; and if you do not sell before January, Australia comes in. There are possibly now thousands of lambs at Home which will have to compete against Australian lambs. To show the difficulties, reference need only be made to Mr. Weddell's report of the 30th December. Now, the curious part of the whole thing is that, notwithstanding the slump in the London market, there has been more meat imported into England from the Continent than there was before. If we think we can put up our prices, we shall find that North and South America, Siberia, Manchuria, China will take our market. We should not keep a single carcass; we should sell, sell, sell. We are exporting at the present time six million carcasses; but in time to come the enormous country north of Gisborne will develop, and, instead of exporting six million carcasses, we shall export ten millions.

*Mr. W. R. May* (Nelson Farmers' Union).—Sir, I do not think any committee you will elect here will be able to give you the information you need under two or three weeks. They are faced with a very big proposition. The distributing of meat in England seems from an outsiders' point of view a very big problem, and I do not think this committee can expect that the meat companies will be prepared or can furnish them the information in the time expected, even if they were prepared to do so. The information has been secured by the meat companies at great expense, and in the earlier stages they lost large sums of money, and if the farmers want to distribute the meat they must be prepared for a large expenditure. It would take at least a million of money to be able to distribute the meat, from a business point of view, through a business association. I have just returned from the Old Country, and made various inquiries with regard to the prices of meat. I was there from March to June, and I made it my business in connection with the butter business to ascertain also the prices of mutton and lamb in the Midlands and in London, and I found it runs from 7½d. to 9½d. Sometimes legs were sold at 10d. While in London I spent three days in Stalworth and the East End and Whitechapel, where the lowest and poorest qualities of meat are sold. There meat was sold at 2½d., 4½d., and up to 6½d., and I do not think the producers would like to fatter that meat; I do not think it came from Canterbury or any other part of New Zealand. I saw nice lamb come into the Smithfield Market from Canterbury, but none of that class of meat was sold in the slums. On the Saturday night the butchers' shops in these low slums simply let it go for what it will fetch by a kind of auction. If a man could not get 2s. 6d. for a leg, he would take 6d., and so on; but it was a very poor class of meat. I think this committee is faced with a very big problem; it is a proposition which will surprise them to have to go into at all. If the farmers are satisfied they are not getting the returns they should get, they must go into the business themselves, and find the money, and solve the difficulty the same as any other business men have to do. Any assistance the Government can give them would be a very good thing; but let them leave the Government out of it, I say, and find the money themselves, and go into it on proper business lines.

*Mr. E. A. Campbell* (Wanganui Agricultural and Pastoral Association).—With regard to insurance, this is a very great and vital question. The question has been lately raised again, and I think there is nobody here could give us the information that we wish to get more lucidly, and get more to the bottom of the whole subject, than the Hon. Mr. Mackenzie, and if he could do that it would be an education to the members attending. Much has been said about insurance, and the way it is carried on at Home, and I think he might enlighten us upon the subject.

*The Hon. Mr. T. Mackenzie* (Minister of Agriculture).—Mr. Chairman, it was my desire merely to come to this meeting and hear what was advanced generally in connection with the frozen-meat trade. If, to-morrow, some time, the meeting desires to hear anything I have to say on the question generally, I should be very happy then to address you. My great wish is to find out from those interested what they have in their minds. If they are going to carry resolutions, I should like to know the reasons behind or against those resolutions, so that I might guide the Cabinet in any decision they might come to, if part of the resolution involves work on the part of the Government, such as grading or help from the High Commissioner's officers. We want to know clearly what reasons are behind those desires. I am therefore here to listen while the whole question is threshed out under its various aspects.

*Mr. C. H. Ensor* (Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association).—With regard to the question of forming a committee, I should like to move that it be composed entirely of producers of mutton and lamb.

*Mr. John Talbot* (South Canterbury Farmers' Union).—I will second that motion *pro forma*. As a natural result, it should be so; but I think this should be a direction to the committee rather than an amendment. Do you not think so, Mr. Chairman?