

The Right Hon. the Prime Minister and the Hon. Mr. Guthrie (Minister of Lands) attended the conference, and the Right Hon. Mr. Massey addressed the meeting. In the course of his address he stated that, in spite of the present market position, he wanted to strike a note of good hope for the immediate future, which he thought he was justified in doing. He pointed out what had been done under war conditions, and stated that the Dominion need not fear to face peace conditions. The important thing was to maintain production at a high level.

A very lengthy discussion regarding the questions of freight rates and contracts, shipping, and markets ensued, and it was finally decided that the representatives of the freezing companies and a committee of producers should confer separately; both to report to the full conference at a later stage of the meeting.

After deliberation, the representatives of the associated freezing companies presented the following report:—

“That, until the producers and freezing companies have independent resources for self-protection in the matter of freights, a contract of some sort is inevitable. That no movement by producers and freezing companies to obtain such independence can be effective until after the next freezing season. That approximately 4,250,000 freight carcasses are anticipated to be in store in June next. To make no provision to lift this volume of output, together with the next season’s addition, is not safe or prudent business, and would very seriously hamper if not prevent c.i.f. rates, to the further detriment of the producers. For these reasons the freezing companies recommend that the shortest-term contract possible, upon the lowest rates obtainable, should be accepted to cover the balance of this season and the whole of next season.

“C. A. de LAUTOUR,
“Chairman of Meeting.”

The report of the committee of producers was that it had considered the proposals made by the freezing companies’ representatives, and there was some difference of opinion about it. The two representatives of the dairying interests did not vote, as their shipping arrangements for the present season had been fixed some time before.

After a lengthy discussion a vote was taken of the producers’ representatives only. This resulted in the conference agreeing to enter into a contract for one year and a half, and authorizing the committee to instruct the freezing companies to negotiate a contract on the lines laid down in the report the freezing companies presented to the conference—namely, for the shortest term possible, and upon the lowest rates obtainable—such contract to cover the balance of this season and the whole of next.

PRODUCERS’ MERCANTILE SHIPPING BOARD.

This matter was brought up at the conference convened by the Board in March, before mentioned, when the following proposals, which had been brought before the meeting of New Zealand freezing companies the previous week in Wellington, where they had received favourable consideration, were considered:—

“(1.) That the Government, having first obtained the assent of the farming and dairying interests through their respective organizations, be requested to provide by legislation for the establishment of a Board of Mercantile Shipping, with powers sufficient to enable it—

“(a.) To provide, *inter alia*, for the overseas carriage of exports and imports:

“(b.) To enter into any contract for such carriage with any shipping company or companies:

“(c.) To acquire suitable ships by way of charter, purchase, or construction:

“(d.) To utilize any ships, howsoever acquired, in any manner whatsoever; to fix rates to be charged, and to prescribe conditions and priorities for carriage by such ships:

“(e.) With the approval of the Minister, to make by-laws for the regulation of all matters incidental to the administration, control, and supervision of such shipping:

“(f.) With the approval of the Minister, from time to time to borrow moneys as may be required by way of fixed loan, debentures, overdraft, or otherwise;

“(g.) With the approval of the Minister, to receive moneys from producers’ organizations, freezing companies, or any other bodies or persons whatsoever, by way of voluntary contribution, from time to time required in order to accumulate a capital fund, or to provide interest or sinking funds for any loan or loans.

“(2.) Any fixed loan approved by the Minister to be guaranteed by the Crown or raised as a Government loan.

“(3.) The Mercantile Shipping Board to be constituted so that at least one-half of its members shall be elected by the representatives of the principal exporting industries, and the remaining members be nominated by the Crown, one of such nominees being nominated as president, with a deliberate and casting vote. The numbers and constitution of the Board and time and method of election of the elected members to be fixed by Order in Council.

“(4.) Provided Government representation as herein provided is approved, a subsidy upon all contributions received by the Board in any year as voluntary contributions under clause (1), subclause (g), should be granted by the Crown.

“(5.) That all moneys accumulating in the hands of the Board and not required for the purposes of immediate administration be invested at short call with the Public Trustee or in New Zealand Government securities.”

After the matter had been fully discussed it was agreed, “That the proposals for a Mercantile Shipping Board be referred to the Producers’ Committee already appointed by a former conference, or any of its successors that may be appointed to-day for further development. The committee to report from time to time to the organizations concerned, but to have full power, with the concurrence of the Minister, to take definite and immediate action.”