

Mr. H. CAMPBELL: The wool-growers would like to discuss the Imperial Government's proposal as a separate body, and I suggest they be given the use of a committee-room.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: Whatever the conference finally decides it will in all probability split up into three separate sections, and rooms and clerical assistance will be arranged accordingly.

Mr. ACLAND: On behalf of the Sheepowners' Federation we would like to have a meeting of the sheepowners and wool-growers as soon as possible before coming to any decision on the matter.

Mr. LYSNAR: I suggest that we come to no conclusion in the meantime. We all have Imperial ideas and aspirations, but we want some facts to go on before voting on Sir Walter Buchanan's motion.

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: My resolution has nothing to do with the details of what the Minister proposes on behalf of the Imperial Government, but merely affirms the unanimous desire of this conference of wool-growers to support the Imperial and New Zealand Governments in this matter, and so help to win the war.

Mr. LYSNAR: As long as that is the spirit of the motion there can be no objection to it; but we want to be free in the end to vote for or against the proposal after we have weighed all the facts. I therefore have great pleasure in supporting Sir Walter Buchanan's resolution.

The motion was carried unanimously, and with acclamation.

Mr. TESCHEMAKER: Do you suggest that each section of the conference—wool growers, buyers, and brokers—should appoint a separate committee to talk over their respective interests? Some of us do not know one another, but we all have a duty to perform to our respective interests and districts, and I think the opportunity of a separate committee meeting should be afforded.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: I suggest that if it so desires each section should appoint a committee to go into the proposal, or it can discuss the question as a separate body without setting up a committee. Then, later on, the result of the deliberations can be placed before the conference as a whole.

Mr. PEARCE, M.P.: It is evident to me that the proposal is to ask the wool-growers to take a lesser price than the present market price in New Zealand. It has been stated—and I wish the Minister to say if the statement is correct—than in commandeering our meat the Home Government simply dealt with the matter on a commercial basis—as a business deal—declining to allow us to interfere in any way with the sale, distribution, or profit in England. If that is to be the case with the wool it will be a guide to the conference as to whether it also should deal with the wool-clip as a business proposal, and on the present market price.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: There is a great deal of difference in the two matters. In the case of the meat there were other contracts hanging on the New Zealand contracts. The New Zealand meat contract was not the only meat contract the Imperial Government were concerned with, and had they altered the conditions under which they were dealing with New Zealand meat, they would probably have lost the supply, in one instance, of 50,000 tons of beef a month. There was a clause in the agreement with the New Zealand meat-producers that they should nominate their agents at the other end for any free meat available. Once the Imperial Government sold the meat at the Smithfield end and cleared themselves it did not matter into whose hands it went. They could not follow it up into the retail trade from the wholesale.

Mr. PEARCE, M.P.: They took up the position that the deal was then complete.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: They took up the position that they would not interfere with the dealer in England, or any general domestic-policy question, as the National Ministry had been formed there—as here—only to cope with questions relating directly to the war. They wanted certain products for their Allies—Russia, Italy, and France—and, no doubt, in the case of the wool it is desired to send it to its destination without, if necessary, transshipping it from the hold of the ship. But if we are to have wool-sales here there will be commissions, claims, and other troubles arising, and the whole of the wool would have to be collected again, so you can see that the proposal of the Imperial Government is going to save time. Under an agreement with the Argentine the Home Government obtained a supply of 50,000 tons of beef, delivered monthly, on condition that they allowed the Argentina people a free market for the rest of their beef, mutton, and lamb in England. That is the position with regard to the meat; but in connection with the wool, on whatever basis you make the calculation there is no question, judging by the latest cabled reports from England, that the prices offered here under this proposal of the Imperial Government are less to a certain extent than the present market rates. But basing the price at a 45-per-cent. increase on the 1913-14 rates, according to the figures available from various departments, this proposal shows a slight increase on the present prices of certain grades of this country's wool. However, that is a detail matter for later consideration. The main question I wish to put to the conference is, are the wool-growers going to agree to the proposal? If that is affirmed, then all subsidiary questions of storage, freights, shipment, and those affecting the wool-buyers and the brokers may be considered on another basis. The main point is, as Mr. Pearce has stated, to consider whether it is a sound commercial proposition, and whether we can fall in with the views of the Imperial Government and meet them in the spirit we should. Another question we are concerned with is that of the valuation of the clip. The New Zealand Government wish to give the producer every possible assistance, and if any man suffers by comparison with 1914 prices he must have the right of appeal for a special valuation.

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: The Government and the settlers will get into no end of difficulties if the basic price is not fixed—that is, the price when the clip is shorn. In the case of the clip shorn in 1913-14 I may point out that some of that wool has not been sold yet. The other point is this: that if the Government wants to keep out of difficulty in regard to the price that the settler is going to receive, if that is fixed on any other basis than the account sales of the settler, then I give warning at once that there will be a field of difficulties to be faced. The price received by the settler, no matter whether the wool is sold locally or in England, cannot very well be an unfair price. There will be no hardship to the settler in having the basic price fixed upon what he receives for his clip of 1913-14.