

Imperial Economic Committee and Empire Marketing Board.

The Imperial Economic Committee was established in March, 1925. They have already presented four reports. In their first report they made recommendations as to the allocation of the annual grant for the promotion of trade in Empire produce and as to the identification of Empire goods, besides recommending the establishment of the body which has now been set up as the Empire Marketing Board.

In the remaining three reports they examined and made recommendations regarding the preparation for market and the marketing of meat, fruit, and dairy-produce.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs will deal with the questions arising out of the work of the Economic Committee and the Marketing Board. I would only say that I am convinced the Board will be able in their selling campaign to appeal to a public already alive to the possibilities of Empire trade and eager to buy British goods.

Producers' Organizations.

A good deal of attention has been directed to the growth of producers' organizations and producers' pools. This development appears to me to be natural and inevitable. It is clearly to the interest of producers to combine to obtain the best facilities in transport and marketing. Moreover, the attainment and maintenance of a high standard of quality, efficient grading and packing, and regularity of supplies, all of which are vital to the development of export trade on a large scale, must be difficult unless these standards can be enforced among all producers. A few consignments, irregular in quantity or quality, may prejudice a whole trade. But the desired uniformity can only be obtained if there is a large measure of combination and agreement among producers. At the same time, consumers are not unnaturally watchful lest producers' organizations should attempt to raise prices unduly. There should be no serious risk of this. The producers are bound to meet keen competition, and it must be the object of producers to increase the volume of their sales and to strengthen their goodwill. Any policy which sought to hold up supplies is bound to defeat itself. Nothing is more depressing to trade than the knowledge that there are large stocks in existence which must come on the market sooner or later.

Need for Accurate Knowledge of Stocks.

This leads me to another consideration. I am sure that it is in the interest of both sellers and buyers that there should be accurate knowledge of stocks; and, therefore, if we can get a fuller disclosure of stocks, first by agreement within the Empire and then internationally, we shall improve the prospects of trade by giving traders certainty on one important factor. We are now preparing in this country the first complete census of production which we have taken since 1907. The Board of Trade hope that by agreement with trade associations and firms in different industries it may be possible to produce, at regular intervals, an approximate estimate of production, at any rate in the more important trades.

Co-ordination of Empire Statistics.

We have on several occasions discussed the possibility of co-ordinating Empire statistics of trade and production, but without getting very far. I do not believe that we shall get agreement by discussions in the air. There are obvious difficulties in any one country altering its basis of statistics without being sure of the result. It is, however, important for all parts of the Empire that we should obtain comparable statistics relating to the commerce and industries of the various countries within the Empire. I would, therefore, propose as a practical contribution that we in the Board of Trade should prepare, as well as we can from the materials available, comparative tables covering Empire production and trade, and should include these tables in our volumes of Empire statistics. We should then all see what the value of this is and where it falls short of our requirements. It will then be easier for each country to determine how far it is worth while altering the basis on which its figures are collected or classified, in order to obtain reliable comparisons.

Proposals for Marking of Empire and Foreign Produce.

The Imperial Economic Committee in its reports emphasized the importance of marking, so that the purchaser may know what he is buying. The Merchandise Marks Bill, which was introduced last May, has passed through Committee and will be taken on report in the autumn session. One of the cardinal features of the Bill is the provision that, where an order is made for the marking of goods or produce, Empire and foreign goods shall be distinguished.

The Purpose of the £1,000,000 Grant.

The object of the Marketing Board is to advise upon the detailed application of the £1,000,000 grant. I have no doubt that, wisely administered, that grant can be made of enormous value in increasing the sales of many Empire products, and in improving, by research, efficiency in production, transportation, and marketing. This grant is being made by the Home Government in lieu of certain preferences which we proposed at the Imperial Economic Conference, and to which we were precluded from giving effect. I think it is almost certain that, operating over a wide field, it will be of more value in increasing sales of Empire produce than the limited preferences for which it was substituted.

Extension and Stabilization of Preferences in Great Britain.

At the same time we have done not a little in the extension of preference. We have enacted those preferences which were within our power, and, what is probably more important still, we have, under