

companies should be prepared to give information on this matter, and not haphazard information, as has been stated. This is an old matter for them, and they should be prepared to come forward and give us information. There is a growing feeling that it is undesirable that these present conditions should be continued, but that the light of day should be let into the matter; and this Conference should not be allowed to think that the freezing companies are voluntarily withholding information. The freezing companies are well provided with information, and they should be able to furnish it, and they should not let it be thought that they are not desirous of giving that information. The committee should meet, and as far as possible give a preliminary report before we disperse to-morrow.

*Sir George Clifford.*—I think it is an unwarranted assumption to say that the freezing companies of New Zealand are withholding information. They are as interested, and more so, in the prosperity of the trade as the farmers are, and any information that is available from their experience would be freely granted to any committee which is set up by this meeting. I may say this: that you may ask questions which, as Mr. Borthwick said, require a great deal of consideration, and probably a great deal of reference to vouchers, &c., before being satisfactorily answered; but I do not think a question hurriedly asked here should be answered by anybody representing a freezing company, without having some space for consideration what the reply should be, in order that the reply may be one which would be useful for the guidance of the committee in making any permanent recommendation. I am sure of this: that the freezing companies of this country are as keen that the farmers' interests should be conserved as the farmers are themselves, for the reason that their own prosperity is bound up with that of the trade, and therefore with that of the producer. I again protest against its going forward that there has been any unwillingness on the part of the freezing companies to do anything that can be done by any body of men for the prosperity of the trade and for the profit of the farmer.

*Mr. J. McQueen* (Southland Farmers' Union).—I think the freezing companies will give all the assistance to this committee they possibly can. Discussion with them will have a good effect. The difficulty of the farmers last season has been brought about by the operation of the law of supply and demand. The enormous increase in the amount of meat placed on the Home market was the cause, and it was placed at a time when unemployment was very general, and the purchasing-power of the consumer was reduced to a minimum, with the inevitable result that followed, and it always does follow. You bring these two things together, a large supply and a weak demand, and there can only be a reduction of prices, and the reduction of prices which we look upon as an evil is the very best way of clearing away the glut. I myself had some mutton and lamb in the London market, and I would rather see that burned than held over to meet this year's supply. It is the best thing that could happen to the farmer, or to any person who is producing an article, that when a glut comes that wants to be cleared away, it should be cleared away at any sacrifice. Of course, a butcher cannot always pass on increased cost, and he often has to keep the price high when he purchases at a low rate, in order to compensate him for his losses when meat is high. With regard to setting up the committee, a conversation with the freezing companies will not occupy long; the various points could be shortly brought out; all the information that the freezing companies can give that will be likely to be of assistance can be given in a very short time. I think, therefore, the committee should meet to-night, and furnish its report to-morrow.

*Mr. F. de C. Malet.*—If there is anything I have uttered that might be misunderstood, I may say at once that, speaking on behalf of the Christchurch Meat Company, if this committee is set up our company will give it every information that lies in their power that will assist the committee in any way possible. We have an organization in London, and if we can assist the committee in bringing in a report to-morrow morning, we shall be most happy to do so.

*Mr. N. Kettle* (Napier Chamber of Commerce).—Mr. Chairman, I am quite in accord with taking No. 3 before No. 1; but I do not think setting up a committee to go into this question to-night is a fair thing to the committee. If we are going to settle the question permanently, the committee must take evidence not only here, but in London. To settle the question would mean the expenditure of a million pounds—even to buy the land to provide accommodation to handle the carcasses, I mean. The committee to-night can only tell us what we already know. We have had charges made against insurance companies with regard to claims and how they are settled. The committee want to go to London and see for themselves. If a man goes to Bond Street he will be told 1s. per pound is the price of meat, but in the back streets and alleys adjoining Oxford Street, for instance, the same mutton is sold at 5d. per pound.

*The Chairman.*—We will now adjourn for luncheon.

At 12.45 the Conference adjourned till 2 p.m.

The Conference resumed at 2 p.m.

*The Chairman.*—Before proceeding to the business, I should like to read a telegram received from the Prime Minister. This is as follows: "The Chairman of the Frozen Meat Conference.—I much regret that public duties prevent my attending the important Conference being held in connection with the frozen-meat industry. My colleague, the Hon. T. Mackenzie, will represent the Government, and, needless to add, anything that the Government can do to assist in the promotion on sound lines of the frozen-meat industry of the Dominion will be most readily done. The problem of how to obtain the best prices without undue fluctuation is an exceedingly difficult one, and can, I think, be only helped to a successful issue by the old law of supply and demand governing it. Much, I think, can be done by mutual effort on the part of the number of interests operating in frozen meat in New Zealand; and I am of the opinion that freedom of action without Government interference, excepting where it can be exercised with the good will of the sheep-growers and the sheep-salesmen, in order to improve the conditions, is essential. When recently in London the whole of the meat representatives asked me to meet them, in consequence of the extraordinary low prices, due to a glut by oversupply. After a full discussion I expressed my willingness, on