

companies trading between this country and Britain. Are they prepared to carry our products at a fair and reasonable rate? If so, well and good. If not, then let us do what under the circumstances seems to be the next best course; and I think a strong committee should be set up to look after the interests of the producers, consisting of the Board of Agriculture, and representative men from the Farmers' Unions, the agricultural and pastoral associations, and the freezing companies. I have sometimes heard it said that farmers are not business men, but I must say that is not my experience. Where their own interests are concerned there are no keener business men in the world. The men of whom I am thinking could hold their own with the representatives of the shipping combines, or the Meat Trust, or any of the other great organizations of which we have heard so much. Let the matter be left in their hands to negotiate along with a representative or representatives of the Government. If a satisfactory agreement cannot be arrived at, and if it becomes necessary to put additional ships in the trade, then the Government will assist to the full extent of its ability. Personally, I think if anything is done in this way the producers should at least be part-owners, because if such an undertaking is to be a success it will require all the support it is possible to obtain, and must be managed upon thoroughly businesslike and systematic lines. If it is left to be financed and managed by the Government, then the development fund will be seriously interfered with, and this will happen: contending parties will seek to outbid each other for political support. We had some experience of this sort of thing not long ago, and the result would be a constant reduction of freights and passenger fares until the balance-sheet showed a loss. This could not happen if the great bulk of the shareholders were producers anxious for the welfare of the company in which part of their capital was invested. If it becomes necessary to start such an undertaking the Government will do its part, either by guarantee or by taking up a proportion of the shares, whichever may be decided upon; but we must do our business as sensible business men, thinking not only of our own interests, but of the greater interests of the Dominion as a whole. If we act in this way and pull together with our full strength, there need be no fear of exploitation from any trust or combine.

"I am quite sure you will appreciate the very great importance of the subject, and I shall be glad to meet representative men to discuss the position at any suitable opportunity.

"Yours sincerely,

"W. F. MASSEY.

"Sir James Wilson, Bull's."

"DEAR SIR,—

"Prime Minister's Office, Wellington, 7th February, 1920.

"I will be obliged if you will arrange that the Board of Agriculture, at its meeting during the present month, go carefully into the matter of the proposed Producers' Committee for England, and its personnel. You are doubtless familiar with the facts of the matter, and I may also inform you that I have expressed myself willing to carry out the proposal to send a committee.

"I will be glad to have the opinion of the Board as to what specific points in connection with New Zealand meat in Great Britain such a committee could be specially instructed to inquire into and report upon.

"Yours faithfully,

"W. F. MASSEY,

"Prime Minister.

"Sir James Wilson, Bull's."

In accordance with the Prime Minister's letter of the 3rd February the Board intimated Mr. Massey's desire to the freezing companies and dairy companies, and asked them to send representatives to a preliminary conference to be held in Wellington on the 19th February. Representatives of the producers were also invited from all parts of New Zealand. Following is a list of the delegates who attended the conference:—

*Producers.*—James Boddie (Farmers' Union, Auckland), Thomas Gibson (Christchurch), Ewen Campbell (Wanganui), James Begg (Dunedin), O. Hawken, M.P. (Hawera), Sir W. Buchanan (Carterton), D. Jones, M.P. (Bennetts, Christchurch), Ewen McGregor (Hamilton).

*Freezing Companies.*—S. Ambury (Auckland), C. de Lautour (Gisborne), W. Murray (Christchurch), W. Harper (Christchurch).

*Dairy Industry.*—North Island: A. Morton (Egmont Village), H. D. Forsyth (Eltham), W. Fisher (Carterton), J. G. Harkness (Wellington). South Island: J. R. Thacker (Okain's Bay, Akaroa), G. A. Lamb (Dunedin), J. Fisher (Otatau).

The Board first considered the various aspects in connection with the whole matter, and with reference to the proposed Commission to visit Great Britain in connection with the handling of New Zealand meat, passed the following resolution, and forwarded it on to the Right Hon. the Prime Minister:—

"That the Board of Agriculture cannot see that any special advantage to New Zealand producing interests would be obtained by a Commission visiting England at present, although later it may be advantageous."

It was thought best, as a basis for discussion, to present a series of resolutions to the conference when the Board met it later in the day, and these were dealt with as set out below:—

(1.) The following resolution was initiated by the conference itself on cabled information laid before it by some of the representatives:—

"Reliable information before the conference indicates that eighteen refrigerating-steamers have come or will come to Australia in January and February, 1920, and that only one million carcasses were in store. The conference desires the Prime Minister therefore—seeing that our stores have five million carcasses, and every prospect of soon being completely filled—to make an urgent request to have some of these steamers diverted to New Zealand. The conference further urges that the Prime Minister should make investigations as to what vessels formerly engaged in the New Zealand trade are now carrying Argentine produce, and to urge the Imperial authorities to restore these vessels for the carriage of New Zealand produce."