

(6.) One of the representatives at the conference brought up the question of the serious position facing many freezing companies whose works were practically full, and as a result the following resolution was passed:—

“That the present serious position of many of the freezing companies be brought before the Prime Minister, and that he be requested to appeal to the Shipping Control Board to supply insulated ships to relieve the congested condition of the freezing-stores, and so prevent the closing of the works, which are practically full, while thousands of sheep and cattle are held in the paddocks waiting to be killed and cannot be held indefinitely without deterioration.”

Mr. Massey had expressed a desire to be present at the meeting, but was unable to attend, as his time was fully occupied at the Coal Conference which was then sitting. He, however, invited the delegates to meet him, which was done after the conference had concluded, when the resolutions which had been passed by the meeting were presented to him by the President of the Board.

Mr. Massey explained the position as to the control of shipping, and read cables which had been passing between him and the Imperial Government regarding the extension of the commandeers, the necessity for the reduction of the congestion in cold stores in Great Britain, the urgency of additional shipping being supplied to lift meat so as to relieve the congestion in the stores in the Dominion, also the alleged preference given to other countries in the matter of refrigerated shipping.

He further stated that he was prepared to agree with all the resolutions that had been submitted to him and to carry out the requests made by the conference. He promised to have a cable sent to England as desired in connection with the present unsatisfactory conditions in Great Britain for the handling and sale of New Zealand meat, and further stated that he would procure all the information it was possible to obtain regarding the employment of steamers in the New Zealand trade which had been diverted to other countries.

Before the meeting concluded Mr. Massey agreed to the President of the Board advising all the interests concerned of a further, larger conference which it was proposed to hold at a later date after the requisite information to be placed before the meeting had been obtained.

After the new Board had been appointed it was decided that, although there was no information from the shipping authorities in London as to the rates and conditions likely to prevail when the Imperial contract for the Dominion products was terminated (as had been asked for by cable by Mr. Massey), the congestion was becoming so acute that it was desirable to meet and discuss matters. A further, larger conference, as called by the Board, was held on the 27th May, and although perhaps, strictly speaking, it hardly belongs to this report, as it took place at the beginning of the term of the third Board of Agriculture, yet it seems opportune to mention it here in view of the importance of the gathering and of the conclusions arrived at.

The President of the Board was in the chair, and delegates from freezing companies, agricultural and pastoral associations, farmers' unions, Sheepowners' Federation, dairy associations, Woolbrokers' Association, Overseas Shipowners' Committee, and New Zealand Frozen-meat Exporters' Association, besides a number of individual representatives of producers and commercial interests, were present.

The Right Hon. the Prime Minister, together with the Hon. Mr. Guthrie (Minister in Charge of the Department of Imperial Government Supplies), as well as yourself, attended the conference. Mr. Massey furnished particulars of the telegraphic communications which had passed between the Imperial Government and the Government of the Dominion, showing how exhaustively he had gone into the question of getting relief from the present congestion of both meat and wool. Amongst the cables read by him was one which had been received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to the effect that the meat contract could not be continued after the 30th June, 1920, owing to the congestion of Imperial meat in England, in transit, and in the stores overseas. The position being definitely settled, the conference's discussions were necessarily confined to the best ways and means of coping with the problems independently of the Imperial Government. As the diverse interests represented at the conference could not well discuss their business in open meeting, it was decided that the conference should adjourn, in order that the different sections might meet and discuss the several matters from their own points of view.

The representatives of the Overseas Shipowners' Committee who were present at the conference supplied lists of the vessels owned by each company, together with their carrying-capacity, and stated that with the usual two voyages a year, after providing for the carriage of butter and cheese, there was space for nearly 10,500,000 carcasses. They gave particulars as to the present freight rates charged, and stated that until the requisition of insulated shipping-space had been removed, and definite information was available as to when the overseas carriage of free produce would commence, it was impossible for them to give definite information as to freights.

With a view of eliminating unnecessary discussion on such a wide range of interests as represented in the conference, it was deemed advisable to set out certain lines along which it was proposed to proceed so as to ensure the business of the conference being carried out as expeditiously as possible.

The freezing companies' delegates were asked for recommendations or opinions regarding the following points, also on any other specific points not mentioned if so desired by them:—

- (1.) Are market prices in Great Britain and purchasing-values in New Zealand likely to be sufficiently stabilized during 1921 to enable ordinary financial accommodation to be given to growers?
- (2.) What action do companies consider should be taken in regard to future shipping contracts?
- (3.) The proposed Commission to visit Great Britain: is it considered still necessary and desirable to carry out this proposal?