

*Frozen Meat Companies.*—W. G. Foster, Wellington Meat Export Company; E. Short, Feilding Meat-freezing Company; H. G. Stringer, Feilding Farmers' Frozen-meat Company; J. A. Mitchell, Nelson Freezing Company; W. Cameron, Wellington Farmers' Meat Company and Taranaki Farmers' Meat Company; J. Milne, Wellington Farmers' Meat Company and Taranaki Farmers' Meat Company; Kinross White, North British and Hawke's Bay Freezing Company; John Clark, Gisborne Sheep-farmers' Frozen Meat Company, Poverty Bay Farmers' Freezing Company (Limited); W. Sherratt, Tokomaru Freezing Company; J. T. Rogerson, Longburn Freezing-works; J. Marx, New Zealand Bacon and Packing Company; W. D. Powdrell, Patea Freezing-works, Whakatane Freezing-works; J. S. Jessep, Wairoa Farmers' Co-operative Freezing Company, Hawke's Bay; S. J. Ambury, Auckland Farmers' Freezing Company; J. Borthwick (T. Borthwick and Sons, Limited); A. Rowlands, Westfield Freezing Company (Limited), Whangarei Freezing Company (Limited); James Begg, South Otago Freezing Company; George Chiewings, Southland Frozen Meat Company; S. V. Burridge, Gear Company; W. Murray, New Zealand Refrigerating Company; H. G. Warren, Nelson Bros. (Limited), Tokomaru Farmers' Freezing Company; W. H. Millward, Gear Company; Ewen A. Campbell, Wanganui Freezing Company.

*Also present.*—The following gentlemen also attended the conference: N. L. McBeth, D. Caldwell, H. Best, W. Oxley, F. Iron, H. R. McElrea, F. H. Sandall, J. Mattheson (Invercargill), Baden Powell (Bristol and Dominions Company), J. Lane, T. Preston, C. Matthews.

The Hon. W. D. S. MacDonald, Minister of Agriculture, presided.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: Gentlemen, I desire to thank you for so quickly responding to my invitation to meet me in conference to-day, but no doubt one might have expected a ready response and large gathering on such an important occasion. Probably the proposals of the Imperial Government to requisition the New Zealand wool-clip, and also the Australian wool-clip, has come with a certain amount of surprise to the sheep-farmers and others interested, as it has to the Government of the Dominion.

A DELEGATE: The Australian wool-clip is half sold.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: That may be the case, but the Australian clip will be treated on exactly the same basis as the New Zealand clip: that is the information I have received from the Imperial Government and the Prime Minister of this country. A cablegram on the subject was received as late as yesterday afternoon, and I expected further cable advice from the Prime Minister this morning, but so far it has not arrived. The Home Government have decided to submit proposals to both the Australian and New Zealand Governments for the requisitioning or commandeering of the whole of the wool-clips, and as a member of the Government of New Zealand I recognize the position is one that requires very grave consideration; therefore I do not ask the delegates to come to any hasty conclusion in the matter. The Government recognize that the farmers have to maintain a sound financial position in order to enable them to meet their obligations, and we also recognize that if the farming community do not maintain a sound financial position the Government of the country cannot be sound. Everybody who has been watching the trend of events appreciates the very difficult position the Imperial Government is placed in. We are at grips with Germany, and to-day it is a question of the life or the death of the Empire. We have in this Dominion to-day wool-buyers who have been representing here for many years big English firms; but there is another class of wool-buyer who has sprung up in this and other countries—the speculative wool-buyer—who is attempting to cut across the interests of the Empire in this time of stress, and that is why the farmers and producers should realize that it is not all a question of pounds shillings and pence, but that there is a great probability that unless some definite step is taken regarding the wool-clip of this season, both in Australia and New Zealand, it will fall largely into the hands of the speculative community, when, of course, the Imperial Government will have to pay exorbitant prices for the supplies that are so absolutely necessary for England and her Allies. If England and her Allies do not succeed in this war your property in this country will be valueless, and it will be quite immaterial what profits you make. A few weeks ago we did not expect to have to deal with this question. The Government were asked not to issue permits to any country excepting the United Kingdom, but before the decision was given practical effect to we had a further request from the British Government to prepare for the requisitioning of the whole wool-output. Then, there is another matter: Besides having to fight the enemy England has to try to keep on good terms with the neutral countries, and when an irresponsible man gets up and asks "Why does not the British Government do so-and-so?" it indicates that he is not aware of the circumstances dominating the position. What we want to do is to try to get a reasonable amount of justice for all concerned; but to attain that end you have to make many allowances that would no doubt be severely criticized in normal times. Throughout the war the population of this country has shown the utmost loyalty to the Empire and to our own Government, and I hope that whatever decision is arrived at by the different branches of trade represented here to-day, they will not look upon the proposal as an attempt to take away any rights they possess, but that the Government are submitting the scheme out of necessity: that they want to control the wool-supplies in the interests of England and her allied armies, and to prevent those supplies falling into the hands of speculators either here or in England. I am not here to ask you to accept the price offered, but I do ask you to do what is honest, equitable, and just to this country and to the Empire. This brings me to the point where I should state that a few days ago the Acting Prime Minister received a cablegram from the Prime Minister in England stating that the Imperial Government proposed to requisition all the New Zealand wool, and that the proposal had come as a surprise, but that the people of New Zealand must not be alarmed at the decision. Then a further cablegram arrived intimating the price the Imperial Government proposed to offer the wool-growers. The proposals are as follows: they wish to take as a basis the pre-war prices of the season 1913-14, on which all the emergency legislation