

and we want to fill every ship that leaves this country. This gathering can take the remainder of this week if they please and ask for more information from England if they desire; but there is going to be no waste of time over this matter, and I do not think anybody wants to waste time.

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: Can you explain to us any particular reason why any surplus wool not required by the Imperial Government, when put on the market and sold, why one-half the profit, if profit there be, should be returned to the grower? I think that is surplusage altogether. I think the Imperial Government should take up the position that the wool belongs to the Imperial Government—the Imperial Government has bought it.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: I do not think there is any need discussing that. I think everybody realizes the position that if the pastoralists come to a decision to sell the wool to the Government under these proposals, there is no question but that any wool put on the market in open competition will fetch very high prices. I think the Imperial Government is fair in saying that if prices jump up “We will let the growers have some of the advantage of the profits on surplus wool.”

Mr. W. H. FIELD: Can we make counter-proposals in regard to the whole question? I notice that the offer is 45 per cent. on the price for the 1913–14 season. Can you indicate what the scope of our counter-proposals may be?

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: I take it that every sheep-farmer will come to a conclusion as to what he really intends to do. The conference can make any number of counter-proposals, but there is no use in making counter-proposals which will not be acceptable to the Imperial Government. The offer of 45 per cent. is a substantial increase on 1914 prices, and is practically on a par with present prices, and with the prices already paid this season. If, in the opinion of members of the conference, the proposals of the Imperial Government are going to bear unjustly or harshly on any section of the people, then it is for them to state their case and submit a counter-proposal.

Mr. KETTLE: As a broker I can quite understand the uncertain feeling in the growers' mind as regards the valuation. There can only be one way in which this can be done, and that is by appointing expert valuers to value each clip of wool on its own merits. In Great Britain the Government has already requisitioned the wool-clip there. Surely they have got a method there which we could adopt.

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: They have got experts there, and we have not got them here.

Mr. KETTLE: We have in this room expert buyers from the Old Country. I can quite realize the uncertainty in the minds of the growers in regard to the valuation. After the brokers and buyers meet we may have some suggestions to make as to how the valuation should be done. We want to see the thing carried out in a way that will be fair to all. I think what we have to consider is the method in which the valuing is to be done. You may have the case of a man whose last year's wool was in bad condition, and this year's wool may be in splendid condition, so that there may be quite 2d. per pound between the two values. You must take his wool on this year's condition. I think it is possible we may suggest some method by which you can arrange a fair and equitable valuation. You have to take into consideration valuation on the condition of the wool this year, and not the condition of past years.

Mr. E. SHORT: Is it the intention to commandeer wool already on the sea?

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: I am only dealing with the wool now here. In reply to Mr. Kettle, I may say that the basis is to be the clip of 1913–14. Except in special areas of a county where there may have been fires or drought, the differences will not be very great. Last year the wool was in good condition, because people were not overstocked. The wool brokers and valuers may suggest a fair method of valuation. If the growers consider the method is not fair they will very soon point out where they consider it is unfair. I suggest that the conference should set up committees representing the different sections of the trade. Suggestions may then be made as to what system of valuing you think is fair. I have submitted to you the offer of the Imperial Government. They want to base their prices for this season's clip on 45 per cent. increase on the 1913–14 wool-clip.

A DELEGATE: Net or gross?

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: It is the net general average of the different grades.

Mr. G. V. PEARCE: The first question is the question of price, and I think this meeting should understand from what point of view we are to look at the matter—whether we are to decide it from a patriotic or business point of view—because we must turn the offer down from the latter.

Mr. J. TALBOT: The point has been raised whether we should not have an opportunity of going back to our constituents before this matter is finally settled. Most of us have come here at twenty-four hours' notice. We would like in regard to the large question to have a little time to consult with our own people. It is pretty awkward if we have to go back and tell them, “We have settled all your business and sold all your wool for you.”

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: I have put the position to the conference as plainly as I can. All I want to say is this: whilst I am not prepared to allow this conference to go on till Christmas or indefinitely, I throw the onus absolutely on the conference as to whether they are going to say Yea or Nay to this proposal, or submit counter-proposals; but delay means losing the chance of getting our exports away, and I tell you that there is to be no export from this country until a decision has been arrived at by this conference.

Mr. MABIN: It comes to this: that unless a decision is come to in a few days shearing will have to be held up.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: There will be congestion all round.

Mr. ANDERSON: Is it not a fact that the British farmers did not pay excess profits tax, and received 35 per cent.?

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: I will look up that point. In reply to a question that has been asked, I may say that I want the wool-growers to have a conference and say whether they accept the proposal or whether they will submit counter-proposals. They might also say how they think the