

DELEGATES: No, no.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: Yes; that is the position.

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: And it is hopeless to expect any departure from the percentage basis, much as we should all like that it should be altered.

Mr. LYSNAR: We will work on the percentage basis, but downwards instead of upwards. Mr. Massey says that it makes no difference. Why cannot we accept his assurance?

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: I think we should accept a fair price and adopt the proposal of Mr. Kinross White.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: There was a chorus of voices that the Imperial Government's offer to Australia was not on a percentage basis. I have here a cable message from Mr. Bonar Law, Secretary of State for the Colonies. In his message he says: "Having regard to this fact and to the probability that it would be impossible to ship large proportion of Australia and New Zealand clips, His Majesty's Government suggest that prices to be paid for the crossbred and merino wool, Australia and New Zealand, should be average of prices obtained by growers in years 1913-14, with addition of 55 per cent." There is the plain statement that Australia has got. I have already supplied the conference with all the figures on that basis. I have also pointed out that it is impossible to vouch for the accuracy of any particular set of figures under the present circumstances. You could not have the work of analysis of the figures done under three months, and you would probably have to go over the figures of every warehouse in New Zealand and also in London. It is almost impossible to get the exact figures for 1913-14 and average all the different wools. I have given the figures as approximately correct. I may say that they were compiled from information received from all sources, and the figures and averages have been carefully worked out by experts. The conference may appoint committees and may take a week to go into the matter, but you will not, I think, arrive at any other decision or conclusion than that which I have indicated. I do not see that in that respect there can be much benefit in delay. I ask you to look at the matter in a fair and impartial way. Every man knows the price he got for his wool, and he knows that he is getting more than half as much again as in 1913-14. The extract I have read from Mr. Bonar Law's cable message shows that the Imperial Government say that it will probably be impossible to remove large quantities of the Australian and New Zealand wool-clip. I may say that I am a wool-grower myself, and I know the position of the backblocks settler. I suppose I represent the largest district in the Dominion; and I am prepared to stake my political reputation that I could convince my constituents from end to end of my constituency that they are getting a good proposal in this 55 per cent.

Mr. CHAPMAN: In the document submitted by the Minister to the conference there is a column—the first column—giving the prices for 1913-14. Will the Minister take that as the basis of values that will be accepted?

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: Yes, that is the nearest we can get.

Mr. D. JONES, M.P.: If those figures are accepted as the basis of valuation we have got a long way forward.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: If the conference is prepared to accept those figures I have submitted as the basis I am prepared to stand by them.

Mr. D. JONES.—I think it might be as well for the conference to say Yes or No on those figures; and I think the conference will immediately agree to the proposal.

DELEGATES: Aye.

Mr. D. JONES: I think we may take it as agreed that the conference accepts the Minister's assurance that that is the basis on which we are working. Having reached that point, I think we have got a long way to a conclusion on this matter. The other point we want to discuss is as to removing inequalities between the various classes of wool. If those inequalities are removed I feel certain that this conference can come to a decision. But if those inequalities are not removed, there is going to be a great deal of heartburning when the conference breaks up; and nobody wants that. I think a committee might be set up to consider and deal with that question.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: The figures defining the position as accurately as is possible are worked out in the document, copies of which have been handed round to members of the conference.

Mr. D. JONES: Yes; but if we set up a committee they might arrange to put some of these classes at 57 or 58 instead of one straight 55 per cent.

Hon. Mr. MACDONALD: Once you start that you will be in trouble.

Mr. D. JONES: If the conference is going on that, and is not prepared to accept a readjustment of different grades of wool, there is only one thing we can do to be rational, and that is to forward the offer as made previously. Is there one man who has supported the motion who has been able to support it by argument? Not one. Every one who has supported it has begun by saying that it is fair to some people and it is unfair to other people. Sir Walter Bechanan says that if we send back a counter-proposal it will not be accepted.

Sir W. C. BUCHANAN: They must come to a conclusion.

Mr. D. JONES: Yes; but we want to come to a conclusion based on facts that will work out equitably. The whole question before the conference is, are we going to deal fairly with the wool-growers of this country? And I submit that we have not realized that we are dealing with eleven millions' worth of wool. That is the problem in front of us. And there are men in this room and out of this room who are going to lose very heavily indeed on the proposals we sent forward before, and they are going to lose very heavily on the proposals we are sending now. The rise in wool is estimated at from 64 per cent. to 70 per cent.—that is the basis—and we are asked to accept 54 per cent., which will be fair to some but manifestly unfair to others. It has been pointed out that some growers are going to get a fair price, and that others will suffer from 2d. to 3d. per pound.