

forward any other points with regard to which we considered some action should be taken. In the discussions we have confined ourselves entirely to the position created by the fiscal system of Britain as it is, but I do want to make it clear that, even in discussing in broad outline the present position, Australia does not wish to come here and enumerate a long list of industries that it desires to be protected in this country. That is not the position at all. That is not our desire. For example, in the greatest primary industry we have in Australia, the woollen industry, I am making no suggestion that we wish to ask for protection for our wool in the British market; similarly with a great number of other commodities; and I want to make it abundantly clear that in talking of Empire preference, and in desiring a certain preference in the British market for Australian production, it does not mean that there are dozens and dozens of things—even running into hundreds—that might be suggested, or that, if this idea of Empire reciprocity were adopted, it would mean that on all the things that Australia produced we intend to ask that there should be a protection in this market. We would only make a request when there was a valuable industry which we considered should get some preference in Great Britain if there was a tariff item in this country with regard to it.

The Critical Position of the Australian Beef Industry.

There is one industry, which I dealt with yesterday, and I do not want to labour it again to-day, which we are very concerned about, not because of what it means to Australia, but because of what it means to the Empire as a whole, and that is the beef industry. That problem is one that I suggest must be regarded from quite a different standpoint from the general question of a future and continuous policy with regard to the question of meat generally. This particular industry is in grave danger of being reduced in a way that would be very detrimental to the interests of the whole Empire. I think our beef industry is more or less in a similar position to agriculture in Great Britain, and while it may be a matter for the future to determine what is going to be done in regard to these particular industries, I certainly think, in regard to the Australian beef industry, we have to find some solution urgently, even if it be only a temporary solution of the difficulty we find ourselves in. But I dealt with that yesterday, and I certainly think that the Economic Committee, which has now been agreed to by the Conference, may present some way in which we can find a solution of this question.

The Food and Materials Committee Report.

In connection with that particular matter I think it would be more or less appropriate to say a word or two in regard to the report which has been submitted by the Committee and which Sir Philip also dealt with. I was the person who made the suggestions which were investigated, but again I want to make it clear, as I tried to do at the time, that I take no responsibility for any of these suggestions, nor have I any brief for any of the methods that were proposed. I indicated that Australia believes there is only one really satisfactory way in which the desired result can be brought about, and that is by a tariff and a preference; but while I said that that was our view, I also indicated that we did not say we had all the wisdom of the world as to how results can be effected, and I referred to the fact that many other suggestions had been put forward, and I indicated that I thought they should really be examined and considered to try and ascertain whether there was any other way in which a solution of this difficulty could be found.

Well, the Committee has met, and the Committee has reported, but I say, with the utmost respect to the Committee, that I cannot believe it was possible for any Committee, in the time which it had at its disposal, to have exhaustively studied this subject, and to have come to a final and definite conclusion as to whether there is any possibility along those avenues, with possible modifications, with possible substantial alterations, or even by some new scheme that might be evolved, of bringing about the result we desire, which is to try and ensure the British market for Empire production.

Further Exploration of the Question advocated.

I would be very sorry if, as a result of the report which has been submitted, we are going to say that the door is closed to any further consideration of any alternate method of dealing with the question of trying to ensure the British market for Empire production, because if that is the position, then it seems to me we are in very grave difficulties in attempting to give effect to what I think is the considered opinion of this Conference—namely, that we should try and ensure the British market for Empire production, having in mind that that will stimulate the development of the Empire generally.

Committee did not close Door on Consideration of other Methods.

The Chairman: May I say at once on that, Prime Minister, nothing was further from the minds of the Committee? We found, as we felt bound to find, that these three specifics were impracticable, but that very fact concentrated attention all the more upon any other ways which were effective. It was not in the least intended to shut out other means; it was only intended to show that those three methods were impracticable, and therefore if we were to achieve our purpose we must achieve it on other lines.

Experiences of War-time Control no Criterion.

Mr. Bruce: I am very glad to hear that is the position, but it does not quite meet me the whole way, because I still hold the view that it would be impossible for the Committee even to have considered these questions as exhaustively as is necessary to make quite sure whether, with some modification or some alteration, our object could not be achieved somewhat along these lines, and I certainly think that the report lays too much stress upon the experiences of the war. The experience of the war was at a time when you had control which to a great extent was designed to limit