

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 21ST AUGUST, 1929.

Address by the Hon. G. W. FORBES, Minister of Agriculture. (No. 1.)

*The Chairman :* I will now ask the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture to make a short statement dealing with the setting-up of this Committee, and stating its objects.

*Hon. Mr. Forbes :* No doubt the work this Committee has to do is a very important one. It has to deal with the question of wheat-growing, flour-milling, and the baking and distribution of bread, which everybody in the country is directly interested in. And I am sure that the evidence that will be placed before the Committee, and the fact of it being published in the papers, will bring very great information to the people of this country. The publicity of the information that will be given in regard to this matter will be very useful, and it will be available not only to Parliament, but to the public generally. What is required is that all those who have any evidence to give on this subject should bring it before the Committee, and then the Committee will be in the position of knowing exactly what the feeling is in connection with this matter, and what the position is generally. I understand that the wheat-growers will give their evidence, and that the others interested will also give evidence. There is no doubt that there has been a feeling in the country that, in regard to the price of wheat, the price of bread is higher than what people think it ought to be. That is the very common feeling in many parts of the country, and if it can be shown by the investigations of this Committee that everything that can be done in regard to the efficient handling of wheat is being done, that will probably go a long way towards allaying that feeling. However, it is a matter for the Committee to deal with, and every interest will have an opportunity of placing its views before you. I think that the publicity that has been given to the Committee should ensure that that is done. I would like to say that it is a most important duty that is placed upon the Committee, and I am sure that the Committee will carry out its duty fairly and impartially. I do not think the members of the Committee will view the question from the point of view of one interest at all. I think that when members of Parliament are placed on a special Committee of investigation the House and the country can depend upon it that they will carry out their duties with a full sense of responsibility, and that, whatever the verdict is, it will be thoroughly impartial and in the best interests of the country.

*Mr. Field, M.P. :* I am here at the request of the poultry-farmers of the North Island. I want to ask the Committee whether they will fix a date for hearing the poultry-farmers of the North Island, because some will be coming from Hawke's Bay and Taranaki, as well as the Wellington District. We will not keep the Committee very long. What date will suit the Committee?

*The Chairman :* We will let you know the date as soon as we can arrange it.

Mr. A. F. WRIGHT examined. (No. 2.)

*The Chairman :* Do you wish to say anything to the Committee at this stage?—Yes, sir.

What is your full name?—Arthur Frank Wright.

And your official designation?—Solicitor.

And you are appearing on behalf of?—Mainly on behalf of a number of farmers' unions and agricultural and pastoral associations in Canterbury and Central Otago, and various Chambers of Commerce.

You represent these people?—Yes, sir; I will give you a list later on.

What is it you wish to say?—Merely that I should like to be present at the taking of the evidence and to appear on behalf of those organizations.

You will be quite welcome to be present and to appear on behalf of those organizations, but you will only have the right to cross-examine witnesses you have a personal knowledge of. This is not a Court of law. We are simply making inquiries into the matter. We do not want to lengthen the proceedings unduly.—Very well, sir. In regard to that matter, I may say that we desire to shorten the proceedings as far as possible, and that is why I was asked to attend to-day, to know the procedure being adopted, with a view to making our evidence as concise as possible, and to be given in the least possible time.

You have the right to appear before the Committee, and to question your own witnesses, I take it; but in the meantime we are not quite clear as to your right to question witnesses other than your own. That can be decided later.

Dr. G. CRAIG, Comptroller of Customs, examined. (No. 3.)

*The Chairman.]* What is your full name, Dr. Craig?—George Craig.

And your official position?—Comptroller of Customs.

Will you make a statement in connection with the operation of the duties on wheat, so that the Committee can understand the position?—Yes, sir.