

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 1937.

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PRESS, VOLUME LXXIII, ISSUE
22122, 18 JUNE 1937, PAGE 10

The Honey Control Board's Affairs

A meeting in Wellington of the National Beekeepers' Association, after hearing an explanation by the chairman of the Honey Control Board of the reasons why Australian honey is being bought for export to Great Britain, has passed a resolution expressing "complete confidence" in the board and approving its Australian purchases. No one who has followed the discussion in "The Press" between Mr W. B. Bray and the representatives of the board and has read the reports of the recent meetings of beekeepers in Timaru and Christchurch will be inclined to accept the Wellington resolution as the end of the episode. There are at least three questions which still require to be answered. The first is under what authority the board is buying honey in Australia. Its function, according to the Honey Export Control Act of 1924, is to control the export of honey from New Zealand, and there is nothing in this act or in later amendments to suggest that it is entitled to import honey into New Zealand. The point is far from being a legal quibble and relates to the whole field of export control. The various export control boards were set up to improve the quality, handling, and marketing of New Zealand exports and to reduce incidental charges such as freight. Prima facie, there is a strong case against their being allowed to handle the products of other countries; and vague statements about the need for filling contracts, such as have been made by representatives of the Honey Control Board, are not a sufficient answer to this case. The second question is why it is profitable to buy honey in Australia for export to Great Britain if no deception is being practised on British merchants or consumers. Is the Australian

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if no deception is being practised on British merchants or consumers. Is the Australian honey exported by the New Zealand board bringing a better price than it would have brought had it been exported by an Australian concern? The third question is why some representatives of the Honey Control Board have been so reluctant to reveal the facts about the Australian purchase if, as they now allege, the whole transaction was a wise and justifiable one. The chairman of the board complains that "misleading statements" about the purchase have been circulated. Anyone who compares the statement made by the chairman to "The Press" on May 31 with his statement to the meeting in Wellington will feel that, if the board's actions have been misunderstood, the blame is partly his. His statement on May 31 contains the following passage:—

A member of the board (an expert on honey grading) certainly did go to Australia, and there has never been any secret about this. It must be perfectly obvious that his mission was not for the purpose of purchasing "rank flavoured" Australian honey. The board did not purchase several hundred tons of honey.

There may be nothing in this that is incompatible with what the chairman said in Wellington on Wednesday; but it will be admitted that the words used lend themselves to misinterpretation. It must be emphasised that the Honey Control Board is not in the position of a private firm. Its powers are defined and limited by statute and the Government is, in the last analysis, responsible for what it does. In the circumstances it is reasonable to ask that either the Acting-Prime Minister or the Minister for Agriculture should state whether the Government has all along been aware that honey was being bought in Australia and, if so, whether this practice has its approval.