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Editorial.

INTERNATIONAL WHEAT AGREEMENT.

The British Minister for Food, in opening the March, 1947, session of the International Wheat Conference, called together to consider a draft agreement prepared by the International Wheat Council, used these words in his introductory speech: "Few, if any, Governments to-day are willing to allow their agriculture to be at the mercy of the unregulated forces of supply and demand in uncontrolled world markets. They seek stability, and obviously the international co-ordination of policies for agriculture is the order of the day."

There is a long story of protracted negotiations with wheat marketing, stretching as far back as 1933, when a previous agreement, which was a failure, was signed between representative nations to attempt a solution to the problem of "unmarketable world surpluses of wheat." Looking at the matter in perspective, the 1948 Agreement can then be considered an achievement in economic collaboration between nations in finding a common ground for the counteracting interests of "deficit" and "surplus" countries.

There is a good deal of difference, it may be observed, in the circumstances of the present as compared with those of 1933, when the previous international wheat agreement was signed. Then the problem was an immediate one of world surpluses and depressed prices. Now it is essentially one of world-wide shortages, rehabilitation of impoverished populations, currency complications, and of finding a means of restoring world trade, with surpluses and depressed prices looming as possibilities in the future. A further difference is that Governments, having acquired the habits of control and of direct dealings with each other during the recent years of war, are now carrying such practices into their further peacetime policies. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing depends entirely upon the interpretation which is given to the role of Governments in the modern State.

At all events the 1948 International Wheat Agreement is of significance as being the first multilateral agreement of its kind since the conclusion of hostilities. Events alone will show with what success it will provide a solution to the problem of stabilising world markets for wheat.