

Fourteenth Day.

9 May 1907.

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IMPERIAL
SURTAX ON
FOREIGN
IMPORTS.

(Mr. Deakin.)

We seem to be agreed that something has to be done to provide increased facilities for communication by mail steamers, with their attendant increased facilities of communication for travellers; improved cable communication which means cheaper cable communication and more of it; the lowering of such charges as those levied in the Suez Canal, with which Sir Joseph Ward has exhaustively dealt, and kindred propositions, which, raising no fiscal question, imply the extension and enhancement of our present means of communication and trade. The great advantage of this development, especially of communication, is that it benefits both ends and any intermediate dominions. It cannot be said that the Mother Country is not herself most deeply interested in this question, even if for the moment we looked upon the Mother Country as severed in her special interests from her Dominions over the Sea. Here is the centre of all communications; every mode of communication has shares of its benefits and confers the greater share in this country. Consequently, the money expended on improving means of communication, whether by ship or by cable, are directly to the advantage of the industries and the people of this country. They are also advantageous at the other end to our interests. Now, I think, in matters of communication our differences in population are measured by the proportionate gain which accompanies them, or, in other words, that the expenditure of the Mother Country in such matters, if in proportion to its population, would at least be met by proportionate benefits from this means. So also in the case of cables and of the general charges imposed on British commerce, not only those levied at the Suez Canal, but any others which tend to diminish the full use of present opportunities. They may be assessed either by population or trade. Having got to that stage, the next question is: How shall such propositions be given effect to? How shall they be realised? What concrete shape shall they assume? It has always been possible for individual Dominions, or several together, to approach the British Government or each other in regard to postal contracts, or in relation to cables, by going the length even of State ownership to provide for conjoint action. I think that on the whole, speaking generally, the postal contracts which have been made have been well worth the money expended upon them—exceptions excepted—and that they still continue to be well worth the money spent upon them, although the mere postal interest is, if anything, less than it ever was before. It is always tending to become less, so great are the other advantages associated with the use of swift and up-to-date steamers with their advantages for the travelling of persons and for the carriage of goods which can afford to pay rather higher freights. These count really for very much in modern postal contracts. We have come to that stage when I understand His Majesty's Government are prepared to consider propositions of this sort, but if they are considered only in an individual fashion with the particular Dominions concerned, we shall have made no advance on the methods which have been employed for many years past. Surely the opportunity has come when we can make a real advance on those methods. Without this Conference, and without more than a general discussion, something may be done now to help us all after this Conference. Is not our duty to seize the opportunity while we are here to consider the means by which the consideration of inter-Imperial business questions may be made more pressing and immediate as well as practical? This resolution suggests one means to that end—the means originally proposed by Mr. Hofmeyr, afterwards further developed by Sir George Sydenham Clarke, and I think further simplified in the proposal which I now lay before this Conference. This implies first of all some fund out of which we can finance any useful general agencies. Next, after creating a fund, although that inverts the usual order of proceedings to some extent—while obtaining it you draw your representatives together for the special purpose of