

Fourteenth Day.
9 May 1907.

IMPERIAL
SURTAX ON
FOREIGN
IMPORTS.
(Mr. Deakin.)

I put in the 1 per cent. instead of leaving a blank, simply in order that the principle of co-operation might be discussed. I mentioned that one-half per cent. might do if this measure were thought proper. I do not waste the time of the Conference on merely abstract resolutions. But it does appear to me, as Mr. Moor very well put it, that we are likely to separate without having come to practical conclusions. I thought it was wise, and have not altered my opinion that it was necessary to submit some broad proposition in order that we might learn from the members of the Government of the United Kingdom, whether they had in their minds any scheme for Imperial action at all, or for an Imperial fund other than the separate schemes which may be proposed from time to time for a steamship service, or a cable service, or anything of that character. I have not been able to elicit even that. On the contrary, I have been met with the usual opposition criticism which we hear so often in Parliament upon a proposition of this sort, when the object is to hurry it conveniently out of the way. I do not object to that. I am sufficiently accustomed to it. But I also appreciate its motives. If the representatives of the Government here had really in their minds any scheme at all, this would have been the time when they could have triumphantly produced it and explained it. I do not mean that they would have brought down details—but they ought to have submitted a plan showing us some possibility of an advance upon our present casual disunited methods of combining for particular purposes here and there. That imperfect method exists and will exist. We do not lose it because we consider whether it cannot be improved upon. My object was to insist upon the need for improvement and only to suggest one means for its improvement. I was not taking a course foreign to the purpose of this Conference, but strictly in line with it. We have not succeeded in getting consideration for preferential trade. I wanted to know if we could not get consideration for something else which did not involve the fiscal principle at all—some method of union for united action. This proposition may be as faulty as you please. I drew it in terms sufficiently loose on purpose. It has at least made our position here quite plain.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : May I suggest altering the last part and leaving the first part out, in order to try to get a decision in only a general way to the effect that this Conference recommended the Legislatures affected with the general purpose of fostering the industrial forces of the Empire so as to promote its growth and unity to provide contributions with that object. If you move something like that, and leave it to us to put amounts on our respective Estimates for the consideration of our Parliaments, we are all right.

Mr. DEAKIN : I think there is a good deal to be said for what you propose.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : I do not want to propose it.

Mr. DEAKIN : I quite understand. But I am not complaining in the least degree of any criticism that applies. I only say the attitude of Ministers shows they have not made up their minds on this question at all. They simply say : "Bring forward a particular proposal and we will look at it." We knew that before. That is a very admirable attitude, the purely negative attitude they always have taken and always will take, and the attitude other Ministers in the same quandary always will take—I am not finding fault with that. I have asked, "Can we do anything more?" The answer is, "We cannot do anything more."

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE : I never said anything of the sort. To bring forward a proposal which will involve our contribution of $4\frac{1}{2}$ millions as against your 100,000*l.*, with no scheme, no plan of spending, not a glimmer