

Mr. DEAKIN : We brought in a Bill last year.

Mr. BUXTON : But I understood it was withdrawn.

Mr. DEAKIN : It was defeated and withdrawn.

Fourteenth Day.
9 May 1907.

UNIVERSAL
PENNY POSTAGE.

Mr. BUXTON : Then I suggest to Mr. Deakin that he should endeavour to educate Australia. As we are all agreed, the penny postage is of the greatest possible advantage, and Australia should no longer stand out from the agreement and the arrangement which was come to all over the rest of the Empire.

One point, perhaps, Sir Joseph will allow me to make in regard to this matter. The chief object, as I understand, or the chief results, at all events, of this Conference is that there is a general desire, on both sides, on the part of the Home Government, and on the part of the various Colonial Governments to meet one another in regard to improved inter-communication from the point of view of Empire, and from the point of view of commerce. After all, this Imperial Penny Postage which exists at present is a very considerable link between the various parts of the Empire. I am not altogether sure, seeing that has only been in effective force for a few years, whether on the whole—looking at it from an Imperial and Colonial point of view—it is not a little premature to press for the other step. Would it not be better to see first if it is likely to facilitate the communication between the various parts of the Empire before we extend its benefits at considerable expense to ourselves—between ourselves and other countries. I throw that out not as hostile to the spirit of this resolution, but as a point which under the peculiar circumstances of the discussions which have occurred here might well be borne in mind.

May I add, in connection with questions of postal facilities and communication that we are now introducing, and are going to suggest to the various Colonies the introduction of the cash on delivery system as between the Colonies and Great Britain. The Imperial Postal Order has now, I am glad to say, been adopted by every Colony with the exception of Canada and of Australia at the present moment; but I am in communication with the Postmaster-General of both the Dominion and of the Commonwealth, and I hope they may be able to fall in with a system, which, as regards other parts of the Empire, is found to be of the greatest possible advantage in enabling small purchases between the Colonies themselves and between the Colonies and Great Britain.

I thought I had better, perhaps, make these general observations, and again express my sympathy with the views of Sir Joseph Ward, and say that when, and if opportunity occurs, it is a matter which we certainly have at heart, and hope at some time or other to be able to accomplish.

Mr. DEAKIN : It is part of the policy of the Government to introduce penny post, but the circumstances in Australia, like the circumstances in some of the other great Dominions, are not taken into account when the refusal of a majority of its Legislature to make that concession is considered. Owing to the sparsely settled nature of our interior, there are places in which it costs us several shillings for the delivery of every letter. We provide what I think, having regard to the different distances to be covered, are remarkable instances of Post Office enterprise. Wherever there are a few tents we manage to make arrangements for a postal service. Many of these are maintained at great cost. The consequence is that while if we were confined to an area such as that of the United Kingdom universal penny postage would be voted immediately—and in fact there is penny postage within several States—we have never been able to get the assent of the Legislature yet to