

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

New Zealand—and I am very glad to have associated with me the Chairman of Directors of that Company, who is upon my right here, a man of very wide experience, who will be able at this Conference to give us the benefit of his long experience and his matured judgment upon points which may be regarded as inimical to the owners of that portion of the international shipping of the world which is owned and controlled in New Zealand. I recognise the stupendous difficulties there are in the way of having general legislation applied to all parts of the British world; hence it is that the Colonies have the more or less limited right, which so far every Government in England has conceded to them, of passing legislation they believe to be suitable for their requirements, the reservation for the Assent of the Crown being the protection between the British people and the interests in the Colonies. Whilst carefully guarding this right we freely admit the principle of uniformity as being desirable, and we hope practical results for the benefit of British and Colonial shipowners, and also of those who man the ships, will be arrived at. In regard to the coasting trade, referred to by the President, and the difficulties which crop up with British owners whose ships are engaged in it, we are fully cognisant of the requirements of our country in that respect. But the British shipowner, when he complains of the difficulty in carrying out his business under a different law in Australia and a different one in New Zealand, from that which obtains in Britain, will, I hope, recognise the right of these Colonies to have a distinction made for the support and maintenance of the legitimate Australian and New Zealand vessels where payments of officers and crews are higher than on British ships. We find that the increase of trade in our country calls for special requirements from our officers and seamen, and our people are prepared to pay a little more freight for coasting services to help recoup the shipowners who are carrying on business around our coast. In my judgment a flexible law governing all portions outside of New Zealand is not practicable. I refer particularly to manning and wages—and I am sure my friend Sir William Lyne will say the same remark applies to Australia—that it would be impossible to have a law of that sort having extended application beyond our own seas. I allude to this because I know it is very important. Now, may I say one word on another subject, as I know there are representatives of the British steamships here. It is well known in England that the British shipowner frequently incurs, to put it mildly, the serious displeasure of the mercantile people in New Zealand by having in operation a bill of lading which from the shippers' point of view or the importers' or exporters' point of view is worse than useless excepting to the shipowner himself. It is a bill of lading which provides for the supreme and absolute protection of the British shipowner, and ignores in the judgment of the mercantile people in our country the rights of the shipper and consignee—certainly it ignores the most ordinary consideration for a shipper from New Zealand or from Australia, and in that respect I think the British shipowner is brought into conflict with a large section of the community who want to see a preference given to British ships and British crews. We are all of us proud to know that more than half of the mercantile fleet of the world is owned by British shipowners; we want to help to develop and share in those large interests in every possible way, and we want at the same time, through the influence of the Board of Trade of Britain, to impress upon the British shipowner that it is a mistake for him to protect himself right up to the eyes and allow people who are paying freightage both to and from, not to be fairly protected within the four corners of a bill of lading in a reasonable way. In conclusion, and speaking generally as to the business of the Conference, I venture to hope that when we have heard the delegates who represent the Board of Trade and the British shipowners, they may see their way to take the New Zealand Act as a base upon which to make some improvements in the interests of the British shipowner, the British officer, and the British seaman. I desire again to express my thanks to Mr. Lloyd-George for the warm reception which he has given us, and to say we are delighted to be present and to see the President of the Board of Trade presiding over this important Conference.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Mr. President, I recognise this Conference called by the Imperial Government, as being so called together mainly because of the proposed legislation of the Commonwealth of Australia,

and I think it is wise to have called the Conference because however clear and concise despatches may be we get much nearer to the object we are aiming at if we exchange our ideas personally. On behalf of the Commonwealth I thank the Imperial Government for extending to us the opportunity of being present to deal with these debateable matters and for the kind remarks that have been made by the President in his opening speech, and which appear to me to be something that augurs favourably to arriving at some satisfactory conclusion. We all recognise that it is a long way to come; not having been here before I recognise it perhaps more than others, and I should like very much to impress upon shipowners that they ought to make it not a question of miles but of time, and by that means shorten the distance very much. But representing as I do a large government, I do not know whether the British people know anything about Australia or not—some of them do not know much about it—but it is very nearly as large as the United States, and I venture to think in the future it will be proved to be, if not quite, very nearly as wealthy and as important, and having that as a possession I hope the British people will not ignore it, and I hope during this Conference that we will have such an exchange of ideas that may bring us closer in time if we cannot in distance. We recognise quite clearly the difficulties which are felt and the necessity, as far as the Imperial Government is concerned, of considering the difficulties beyond those which apply to any one particular colony. We recognise your difficulties with treaty rights which we have not, and in many other ways you have difficulties to contend with that we have not to contend against. But still, if our young countries do not move so slowly as the President described the movements of our Mother Country, we still do move and move to some service at times, and service too—as we proved—as far as the British Empire is concerned. That being so, we feel that whilst we will be very persistent in obtaining what we think we ought to have under the different conditions between the Mother Country and Australia and New Zealand as well—because we are sisters—we are close together—what one does the other generally does—but whilst that is so, I think the Imperial Government will recognise, and I think the shipowners might recognise, that the payment to seamen in Australia would not be accepted as it is in Great Britain—it is the rates of wages I am speaking of. That is one open question which we have to consider, and whilst I quite agree with the President, who was very judicious, I thought, in his remarks that there should be nothing debateable touched upon now, at any rate in detail, and I will try and not to touch upon any question in detail, still we shall have to meet these things face to face before we leave this Conference, and I think it is well to issue a word of warning that that will be so before we leave this Conference. I hope that we shall come to some definite conclusions; still, if we cannot come to that definite conclusion, it will, I believe, have done good to have had the exchange of our ideas. Another thing we recognise too, is the immense trade that Great Britain carries on with her mercantile marine. As the President said, half the merchant fleet of the world belongs to Britain; we recognise that too, and we are very proud to belong to the British Empire and to consider that fleet a part of our fleet too; but we ask those who do our trade or do trade on our coast, which is a very long one, about 8,000 miles of coast line, that when they do their trade they will do it under the same conditions as our own people have to do it, and I do not think that is asking too much. That is one thing which we will be very definite about. We have one or two other questions of very considerable importance. I refer to wages, and also to two others which are very important, but, meanwhile, I am only going to refer to these in a casual way. One is regarding the condition of seamen and another is regarding the employment of coloured seamen. These matters are sure to be brought up in detail at this Conference, and we have very strong views in Australia on these particular points. There has been I think, Mr. President, some little misconception regarding our proposed legislation in Australia. I saw somewhere that the consideration was taking place of a Navigation Act which was, I think three years ago or two years ago, submitted to our Parliament by myself. It was in consequence of that Act the Royal Commission sat, and the Royal Commission in its recommendations does not approve of many parts of that Act. I have with me, though I do not desire to submit it because it has not