

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

concern of the shipowners, and I shall not agree to anything of the kind, so far as I am concerned. Now the point seems to me to be as to whether or not improper ships are to run in the trade. I say, so far as I am concerned, they are not to. We have to look first to the sanitary arrangements, and to the accommodation of the men, and to the health of the men. That is certainly predominant above any consideration for shipowners. If, as the shipowners say, we are going to injure our trade, we are prepared to put up with all that. We will not injure our trade in any shape or form, that I am convinced of. But whilst I should like, so far as I possibly can, to meet the shipowners in a reasonable way, I do not think we should subject ourselves to the consideration of the shipowners altogether, and I am a little surprised at the remarks just made by Sir Joseph Ward, because the words used seem to me to coincide with the shipowners, and I do not believe in that at all, in this particular case. I do know the feeling that exists in our country in this matter, and I do feel and know that Australia without a very big struggle is not going to give up the right of dealing with these matters. There is no doubt in my mind about that. And however much it may be the desire of the shipowners to control the trade of their ships, Australia is not going to allow it unless they are overruled, and that would not be a very pleasant thing to be done. I speak from my knowledge of Australia, in which I give place to no man, or the ideas of our legislators, and our electors in this particular regard, and I feel that so far as I am concerned I have to be very firm regarding the accommodation given to ships. And one of the sorest points that we have in Australia is the fact that so many foreigners are employed in the shipping trade, and also so many Hindoos are employed. They are British subjects, but when you pay a man 4½d., as against 6s. or 7s., it comes home to the pockets of the men very strongly. That is what they are paying Lascars to-day, 4½d. I speak emphatically about this, because I know how emphatically it is thought of in our country. I hope nothing will be done that will restrict absolutely the power of the Government in dealing with a question of this kind. As I said before, the shipowners must trust Australia a little more than they do in this and every other regard, although they do not seem to like to. But the Government of a country, where life and limb and health is concerned, is the proper instrument to deal with it and not the Supreme Court; and I also oppose the power being taken out of the hands of the Government by the Supreme Court.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: I should just like to say I have not consulted any shipowner in connection with any motion I have moved, nor am I likely to. What I have done, I have done as expressing my own opinions, and I intend to do so on every question and as I think proper. I only want to say that in New Zealand we have no Lascars in the employ of the owners; we have no Lascars trading to the country except with an occasional cargo that comes from Calcutta.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: You are in an absolutely different position from us.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: I want to do what appears to be right. We have a very advanced shipping law. I am only anxious to try and help out of what I know to be a great difficulty. We had our shipping law held over for the assent of the King for nearly two years. That was on account of the advanced state of our law, and there is not a thing in our law which is retrospective. I am anxious to help Sir William Lyne to see a better position of affairs in the Australian waters. I made my remarks believing that finally there will be an honest effort made as a compromise if we want to have an effective law.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Will you allow me to say, so far as these remarks are concerned, would you sit quietly by as the Prime Minister of New Zealand if there was a ship built already coming to your waters that you knew perfectly well was an unwholesome ship for seamen? I want to ask you that question, because according to your remarks you would have to allow it.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: No, I certainly would not.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: I say I will not agree to the Government of the country's power being taken away if an urgent case arises.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: And neither will I. That is not the question, however.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Mr. President, I want to say this. I would very much like to see a compromise arrived at, because while it is perfectly true, no doubt, that the Australian people will do what they think right in making such legislation as is suitable for them, yet if we can get by a compromise something that will be operative throughout the Empire I am sure we ought to agree. That is what we come here to do, because we all of us have the power of doing anything we please for ourselves, but we come here to do something for us all. Well now, the New Zealanders are in an entirely different position to us. They can sit down and watch the business going on. They have passed their Act, and now they have come here to discuss whether what they have done is or is not suitable. But anything this Conference may do may very seriously affect our legislation, because, as I have no doubt the Conference know, parties are very easily balanced in the new Parliament of Australia, and if any opposition to our proposals will strengthen the hands of the opposition. It might make all the difference between a certain clause passing and not passing, and so it is a very important thing to us, but in New Zealand it does not matter at all.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: Oh, yes it does. We have not the power to do anything under this now; we have not the power to force an alteration on an existing ship.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: You have certain powers given to you by the Act. With us, we are seeking to introduce new legislation entirely, and although in some respects we propose to go farther than in New Zealand, in general we propose to go along the same line. What we are chiefly anxious to do is to be fair to the Australian shipowner, and what he says is this: If you are going to compel me to pay certain wages, to provide certain accommodation, and to compete with men who do neither, you are going to do me a great injustice. We do not want to do them an injustice any more than we want to do an injustice to the crew or the passengers or to you. Now the shipowners will have to provide 120 feet, and what is more they will have to provide for each officer up to at least four a separate room with cubic capacity of not less than 180 feet. They will have to provide a certain number of men, and in two States there is an Act which provides machinery for declaring how much wages he shall pay, and by an award of the High Court of Australia, the Arbitration Court, it has been declared what wages and conditions officers are worked under, and these officers are paid according to the law laid down. Now you seek to compete with these people, and we are only asking you to compete on fair terms. So far as accommodation is concerned, it may be impossible or very expensive for you to make structural alterations; but it is not so much the cubic space, although that is of course very necessary, but it is the ventilation and the sanitation. Now as to ventilation, every man knows that a ship is usually ventilated by shafts, and the sailor whose bunk is underneath to prevent being blown out stuffs his clothes up the spout. He gets some little relief, but the man two bunks off is nearly asphyxiated. Now our proposals as to ventilation can be complied with; you can ventilate without very much expense and without any structural alterations at all. If you will ventilate your ships properly—scientifically—you will do a great deal towards reconciling us to any suggestion you can make which shall apply to ships now constructed. I feel sure Parliament will go a long way out of its way to meet you in regard to any fair proposal. But the men ought to get fresh air and baths and wash-houses.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: That you suggest should be retrospective.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Sir Joseph Ward suggested 100 cubic feet to apply retrospectively. If that were to apply retrospectively wherever the 120 feet was not possible, and ventilation and mess rooms and a bath, we would do what we could to meet you.

MR. MILLS: Sir William Lyne expresses himself so uncompromisingly; that is to say, under all conditions the increased space must be provided. We also have to bear in mind that a further provision of the Bill