

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

MR. LLEWELLYN SMITH : No; it comes into force on the 1st June.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : Now that it has been passed, every ship built during the past six months has had in contemplation this section. Of all those ships that are engaged in the trade, a very large number could be so altered as to make provision for this section. A number of gentlemen do not seem to see the necessity for this; but a very large number of those vessels ought to be altered without any delay at all. The accommodation on some ships is simply disgraceful; there is no other word for it. Some of the very best ships, so far as passenger accommodation is concerned, have absolutely the worst accommodation for seamen—absolutely the worst. I have lately had an opportunity on the Royal Commission of seeing these things. We went round to a large number of ships. Some are tolerable and some intolerable. We are only asking for suitable accommodation; 120 feet is not too much. We only ask that accommodation shall apply to those engaged in our trade.

THE CHAIRMAN : You are asking 120 feet in addition to bath room and mess room.

SIR JOSEPH WARD : Might I suggest we settle one point first. Is this to be retrospective or not? In our law in New Zealand we do not make it retrospective, neither do I think it would be a fair thing to suggest here that we should make all this retrospective.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : You see what I don't like, want to ask one thing. The resolutions that have been carried, it is not for me to remind you, in reference to the conveniences of ships, could only apply to vessels registered in these Colonies or engaged in their coastal trade—what does that mean?

HON. DUGALD THOMSON : We have to define that yet.

SIR JOSEPH WARD : That is left open.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : You see what I don't like, and why I raised the question. You are passing resolutions, and we may not pass resolutions. One resolution hinges upon another. The resolution as it is I don't agree with unless there is something passed to define, as we want it, what is coastal trade.

THE CHAIRMAN : It is all subject to that. And now we have got on to 4, we have to discuss this.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : Sir Joseph was saying something about not making this retrospective. So far as it can be made retrospective, it should be; that is to say, so far as alteration can be made to make the accommodation sufficient. I want you to follow this, Sir William; we suggest 120 cubic feet should be the minimum. Mr. Hill says that 72 cubic feet has been for many years the minimum to which the British mercantile marine has built its ships, and to ask them now to make such alterations as would enable them to comply with our section or our proposed law would entail very considerable expense and practically make it impossible to engage in the trade at all.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : If the principle is right, the expense should not be considered.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : What I say is this. That in very many cases the accommodation is bad, and an alteration ought to be made, but where such alterations cannot be made, on the certificate of a shipwright surveyor that the alterations cannot be made at all, well then the Minister may, with the concurrence of the Medical Inspector, make some exemption in the case of ships already built. But there ought to be a time fixed; say, two years from the passing of the Act or twelve months when ships desirous of entering into the trade other than those registered in Australia should make an effort to comply with the Act, and those who do not get the exemption cannot expect to engage in the trade.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON : I'd like to say a word on this. I think there are three members present who were members of the Mercantile Marine Committee which had to consider accommodation, and I think the members present will agree with me that the evidence submitted to that committee by shipowners

and Board of Trade experts went to prove that in very few cases were the men limited to 72 cubic feet. I think in the majority of the ships it was proved they had over 120 cubic feet. Well, the evidence is available, and if I am wrong I will stand subject to correction. It was said that German ships did not have a standard equally as good as ours; now we have information which proves that the German ships are equal to ours in every respect.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : They are better.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON : I am dealing with the evidence I gave the other day. I say the evidence is available, and it will bear out my statement that the whole of the evidence given by shipowners and Board of Trade experts went to prove that in few ships indeed were they limited to 72 cubic feet; and I cannot understand Mr. Norman Hill raising such a big point on this when the evidence given by the shipowners themselves went to prove that they did not limit the men to 72 cubic feet at all. Why this change of front? They must have either been wrong before the Mercantile Marine Committee or they must be wrong now.

MR. NORMAN HILL : There is no change of front. It is quite true that there are very few ships in which the men are limited to 72 cubic feet; but there are cases in which very ample accommodation is provided in the way of mess rooms and bath rooms, where it is practically impossible to give 120 feet in the sleeping accommodation. Mr. Hughes has used a hard word when he said the accommodation on some ships was simply disgraceful.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : I don't hesitate to say it. If you ask what ships, I will give you half a dozen.

MR. NORMAN HILL : The illustration was that 72 feet is disgracefully inadequate. May I remind you that the Government of Australia, when they introduced the Bill in 1904, thought that was the right amount.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : I should not hesitate to apply it merely because the Government said so. They come and go in Australia like they do here.

MR. NORMAN HILL : But it is a little bit hard that in making the Act retrospective there should be something like forfeiture or driving ships out of the trade.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : They won't be driven out of the trade.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON : Mr. Norman Hill, I have the evidence here of the statement put in the other day of the difference.

MR. NORMAN HILL : I have worked them out.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON : Here are the figures:—Lampport and Holt, 74; British India, 94'5; City of London, 84'3; Anderson Bros., 105'9; Furness Withy, 118'7; and so on, and in no case are they limited to 72 cubic feet.

MR. NORMAN HILL : I agree if you take those instead of taking them over the whole. If you take ships 10 years old, and five years, and new ships, you will find there has been steady improvement, and the old ships would be driven out.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : Some of the newer ships have as bad accommodation as the older ones.

MR. NORMAN HILL : But they are given much better mess room accommodation.

MR. BELCHER : I entirely agree with what has been said by Mr. Hughes that in the cases where it can be made retrospective it should be, because the complaint of the seamen both in Australia and New Zealand with regard to accommodation, even in some of the newest vessels, is that it is inadequate. That is the complaint of the men. I have visited ships myself and seen where these men have to live, and I say without any hesitation that the places are not fit for the number of men. Now if this idea is put into force and is not going to be made retrospective, we should have this condition: that there will be ships that are comparatively new now and which may run for the