

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

of those who would have to find what could be done, and what reasonably should be done, I cannot see any objection to it.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Sir Joseph Ward's motion, so far as it goes, seems to me very reasonable, but it does not say what is the alternative—what is to be done in the case of those ships where the Minister is satisfied that the structural alterations necessary in order to comply with the limit would be unreasonable.

THE CHAIRMAN: That has disappeared. Sir Joseph has accepted Mr. Norman Hill's wording as an alternative, so that that is out of the field.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I do not agree with that, and if necessary, I shall move this amendment. What I was saying is that Sir Joseph's motion seems to me very suitable, provided that it set forth what was to be the alternative. Now, the motion that Mr. Hill read is very indefinite, and very vague. To say that the sanitary and other health conditions should be maintained, involves merely a matter of opinion. If people are healthy, the assumption is that the conditions in which they live are sanitary and proper. But, in an Act of Parliament it is usual to set forth the conditions which are on the whole suitable for the promotion of health. Now in our Bill—the Bill the Commission sat on—Clause 135 says that "Every place in a ship appropriated to the use of seamen or apprentices shall have for each seaman or apprentice a space of not less than 72 cubic feet."

THE CHAIRMAN: What section is that?

HON. W. M. HUGHES: That is Section 135. That is the Merchant Shipping Act again. It is practically a repetition of Section 210 of the Merchant Shipping Act.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Does not that apply to new ships? Does that apply to all ships?

HON. W. M. HUGHES: This will apply to all ships. After saying that there shall be no paint-locker, latrine, and so on, it says: "If any place in a ship appropriated to the use of seamen or apprentices is not so kept free of articles, or if any paint-locker, latrine, or similar erection is built in contravention of sub-section (1)," certain things will happen. Now it is only contended by Mr. Hill on behalf of the shipowners that the expense of having to make structural alterations may be considerable, and in some cases that no alterations are practicable. I can understand that. You cannot say that if a ship has only been constructed to hold a certain number of seamen with 72 cubic feet of space each, and you are asked to provide 120 cubic feet each, that would be practicable. In some cases you simply could not do it, any more than you could put three pints into a quart pot. You cannot do it simply because a section in an Act of Parliament says that you must. But there seems no reason at all why the sanitary arrangements should not comply with the Act, and why baths and mess-rooms—

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: They come under the word "sanitary."

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Of course they do. The only thing is that it does not say so.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: They come under the word "sanitary."

HON. W. M. HUGHES: No doubt they do. Am I to understand that the Merchant Shipping Act does not make provision for sanitary arrangements? Of course it does. The only thing is that the sanitary arrangements must be very largely a matter of opinion, unless it is specified what the sanitary arrangements are to be. The sanitary arrangements at present are quite inadequate, and therefore so far as the cubic capacity and cubic space is concerned, I am quite satisfied that a motion on the lines of that given notice of by Sir Joseph Ward should be adopted, provided that there should follow a proviso of this kind: "Provided that if the Minister is satisfied that the character of the structural alterations necessary in order to comply with the limit would be unreasonable, the Minister may, with the concurrence of the medical inspector or other person, permit the owner of the ship to appropriate other accommodation to the seaman or apprentice of space less than specified, so that not less than 100 cubic feet and 15 superficial feet shall be provided." Of course, in asking 72 cubic feet, we are asking the shipowners to do nothing at all but

what they are doing now under the old Merchant Shipping Act, but in reference to sanitary arrangements, baths, the absence of impedimenta, from the seamen's quarters the efficient ventilation of the seamen's quarters—all these things are, in my opinion, even more important than the allotment of a certain given amount of space, because if that space be ill-ventilated, ill-lighted, and not free from bad odours, the condition of the seamen will be bad, even if you give them 200 cubic feet. It would be better to have 72 cubic feet well lighted, and well ventilated than 120 cubic feet badly ventilated and lighted, and therefore I say in respect to the ventilation and the sanitation required by the Colonial law, no exceptions can be made, or should be made. In respect to the cubic space allotted to the crew, I am quite willing that in cases where structural alterations would be impossible the 72 cubic feet should stand. I do not believe that in very many cases it would be necessary, but as far as ventilation and sanitary arrangements are concerned, I do not think any exception at all should be made, and I shall not vote for it.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Mr. Hughes must not, I think overlook the fact that we are discussing here British ships, and British ships have been under these conditions—the particular conditions he refers to as to keeping the crew's quarters free from stores and such things since 1867. The provisions as to ventilation and other things have been in operation here since 1854. There is no British ship conforming to the law that can spoil the crew's accommodation in this way.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I am not overlooking it. The Commission went on board several ships, and quite apart from that I have been over a great many ships, and on hardly one have I found the sanitary arrangements adequate. Therefore it is not a question of conforming to the Merchant Shipping Act, but of conforming to a very much more stringent administration and a more stringent clause that is in question. The Colonial law will have to be made more drastic than the British Act in that respect, and you have no right to ask, I think, that in regard to the health of the crew you should be exempted at all, save in those cases where you really cannot make any more room for them. I admit that you ought to have exemption, so far as mere space is concerned, in those cases, but where it is a question of giving them fresh air, water to wash themselves in, and freedom from unwholesome smells, I do not think any shipowner ought to ask for any exemption.

MR. NORMAN HILL: We do not ask for it. The 6th section provides for that.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I am quite aware of it, but the only thing is that nobody takes any notice of it.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Is not that a matter of administration? Have those cases been brought to the attention of the Board of Trade?

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I am quite aware of it.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Have they been brought to the attention of the Board of Trade?

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I could not say.

MR. NORMAN HILL: If the law as it stands—

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I am not a seaman. I will simply ask Mr. Belcher, who is a seaman, if it is not the fact that in nine cases out of ten there is no accommodation at all for seamen that can be termed decent in large ships and small in the British Mercantile Marine?

MR. NORMAN HILL: The law says they are to have proper accommodation, properly lighted and properly ventilated. Now, if the law as it now stands is of no use because it is not enforced, surely it is no good passing another law which would lead to the same thing.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: We are not passing any other law. We are not passing or seeking to pass any other law instead of that: we only say that with regard to our interpretation of what sanitary provisions and health conditions are, the Colonial law should govern the condition of vessels that trade to Australia, and in that respect you ought not to ask any exemption, because if present conditions are all that is required, the enforcement of those conditions can impose no hardship upon you, and therefore we are asking for no change. That cannot hurt you