

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Whom would you appoint to make that?

MR. NORMAN HILL: Here the Board of Trade has authority to stop any vessel which by reason of undermanning is, in the opinion of the detaining officer, unseaworthy. That has been enforced since 1897.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: Not in the stokehold.

MR. NORMAN HILL: If there is any deficiency in the manning of the stokehold which makes a ship unseaworthy.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: It is not found out until the ship is at sea.

MR. NORMAN HILL: That is for the Board of Trade. Our Parliament has placed that responsibility upon the detaining officer.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I should like to ask if Mr. Norman Hill can give us a reference to where the Board of Trade has power to interfere with the stokehold.

MR. NORMAN HILL: If it affects seaworthiness. We believe that it would be bad policy to introduce any system based on manning scales.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: What do you mean by the term "seaworthy"?

MR. NORMAN HILL: If the vessel can be navigated with safety to the life and property on board.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Even supposing one man has to do two men's work?

THE CHAIRMAN: The real difference is not one of principle. Mr. Norman Hill, on behalf of the ship-owners, admits the principle of the right of the Government to interfere with the manning of ships, but he objects to a rigid scale.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: I fancy I understand that.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: I wish to ask Mr. Hill if the remarks he made just now apply to the New Zealand shipping law.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Yes. Can you and do you apply the scales in your Act to many of the existing types of vessels which are now working?

SIR JOSEPH WARD: In our case we give a minimum only.

MR. NORMAN HILL: You give a minimum, but are there not at the present time many vessels engaged in your trades which could not with safety be worked on that minimum—new vessels? In other words, are there not now many vessels which necessarily have to carry much greater crews than you provide for?

SIR JOSEPH WARD: We have a minimum.

MR. NORMAN HILL: But if there are vessels now in existence which cannot be safely navigated on your minimum, your Act is a delusion and a snare.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: We insure that under certain conditions not less than a certain number of men should be carried. If the vessel, in the opinion of the owner or anybody else, should have more, that is all right. All we wish to go for is the preservation of a minimum.

MR. NORMAN HILL: It does not secure safety.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: We do not go into the question of tonnage or anything at all of that sort.

HON. DUGALD THOMSON: A certain horse-power?

SIR JOSEPH WARD: Yes.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Unfortunately the minimum becomes the standard down to the point at which it is fatal to development and improvement, and it encourages bad ship management.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: We are so content with our laws that I do not want to interfere with them. In our case it works very well.

THE CHAIRMAN: I should like Captain Chalmers, on behalf of the Board of Trade, to say a word about this before the debate proceeds.

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: There was a Committee appointed by the Board of Trade, which sat in 1894 and 1895, and that Committee reported. The majority report and two or three of the minority reports practically supported this in substance, with regard to the manning of the deck: first of all that the Government should pass an amending Act and constitute undermanning as a source of unseaworthiness, as well as overloading and defective equipment and machinery. That was done. Then the recommendations of the majority report were adopted with regard to the minimum number of deck hands which should constitute undermanning; that was that if there were a sufficient number of hands on deck, in addition to the officer of the watch and the master, to be divisible into two watches, having one at the wheel, one at the look-out, and one about the decks to trim the lamps or do anything that was needed, no vessel which came up to that standard should be deemed unseaworthy. That was adopted, and the regulations put forward in a circular by the Board of Trade.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: Do I understand that that applies to cargo and passengers alike, to all but emigrant vessels?

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: It applies to all except emigrant ships.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Do you think that three men would be sufficient on a ship?

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: We who have had control of the largest mercantile fleet in the world consider it answers the minimum of safety—that it comes up to the standard of safety.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: On a 6,000-ton vessel, or a 10,000 or 12,000-ton vessel?

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: While that ship is being navigated at sea it does not matter whether she is 3,000 tons or 10,000. What we have to consider is such undermanning as will cause serious danger to life, and with regard to the exigencies of navigation, with a hand keeping a look-out, a hand at the wheel, and a hand about the deck, the purposes of safety are covered. We have had an experience of over thirty-one years now; we have had the power to detain unseaworthy ships all this time; and our experience is based upon the constant diminution of both loss of life and property at sea, with the largest mercantile fleet the world has ever seen, and we are quite content with the results. We are quite content with it because we have a loss of life and property at sea which is proportionately far smaller than in the case of any other fleet in the world.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Do you think they only keep three men on deck? I know when I was coming here they had more than that.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Have you done anything with the officers at all?

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: With regard to the officers, we have an officer on each watch.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: You do not do anything with reference to the boats? You do not have a competent person to each boat?

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: Among the life-saving appliances which these vessels carry, they have to carry on each side a lifeboat or lifeboats sufficient to carry all persons on board, so that if anything happens to that ship all the crew can get away in lifeboats. She has to have on each side of the ship a lifeboat capable of carrying all hands on board. If she has a list to one side, and has to be abandoned, there is the other side available. If both lifeboats are available, they can divide themselves and go in two boats.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Is a competent person allotted to each boat?

CAPTAIN CHALMERS: That we leave to the discipline of the ship when she gets to sea. We do not interfere with regard to that because we find it is done in practice.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Has your Department power to do that by administration, if you like?