

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

committee very much upon the lines the Commission suggested. We call our committee a committee to adjust anomalies. Its functions will be to determine how many men are sufficient to man a ship in the case of a new type of ship, or where there shall be a complaint by the shipowners that there are too many men, or by the seamen that there are too few. We consider that it is impossible to lay down a hard-and-fast scale for all ships. I admit that that is impossible.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is a very important admission, but could you put it rather into your resolution, because that looks as if you had a hard-and-fast scale in your mind.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: That is the troublesome part of the resolution.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Allow me to explain. One cannot put everything in a resolution. I was just going to explain it. You will see that in our Report we speak about the difficulties urged by those who gave evidence before us, and we have thought that those difficulties might be avoided if we appointed a committee to adjust anomalies.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Do I understand that that has been already done by the Imperial Government?

HON. W. M. HUGHES: If you will allow me just to go on for a moment, what I do say is this. I strongly urge that the British mercantile marine in general ought to have the benefit of a scale of manning, just as they have a scale of provisions, and a number of cubic feet of air space and accommodation, and so on. There ought to be a minimum number. They ought not to be permitted to send ships to sea undermanned. I do not say that they do so habitually, but I say they do so occasionally. They are not undermanned in the technical sense of the word, but they are not efficiently manned. Now you have, Mr. President (I think very wisely, indeed) taken care, under your new Act, to insure the competency of seamen by insisting upon their having served a certain period at sea. They cannot be A.B.'s now merely by the production of a discharge, if I understand the matter rightly. But that is no good unless you have sufficient numbers. In the Australian Parliament, I feel sure the majority will support a manning scale. I should like to say that I feel thoroughly with Mr. Thomson that it is extremely difficult to fix upon a scale, but the appointment of a committee, such as I have referred to, does away with a great many, if not all, of the objections.

HON. DUGALD THOMSON: There is no difference of opinion with regard to the ships being properly manned.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: The difficulty is to get just what is enough without having too many, and I wish to say myself, as an Australian, that all we desire is to see this salutary principle enforced upon all British ships, because we believe the British mercantile marine is not only one of the chief, if not the chief, industries of the State, but that its Imperial significance can hardly be exaggerated.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you recommend a scale in your Report?

HON. W. M. HUGHES: We do.

HON. DUGALD THOMSON: The majority recommend a scale, but the minority take exception to it.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Mr. Thomson was very careful to say that he did not assent to this, and he was perfectly right to do so. We have it here, on page 29, in my volume; the paging is different in yours, but you will find it under the heading of "Manning," No. VIII. In that, we deal with officers. We lay down a scale for officers, and then we lay down, further on, a scale for seamen, and for the engine room—for engineers and for stokers. Now I want to say this, with regard to the stokehole. We recognise a very great difficulty there, and we have recommended a coal-consumption basis, and if the Conference cares to do so, although I would not suggest that it should do anything more than consider the principle, subject to this qualification which I have made mention of—namely, the appointment of a Committee to adjust the

anomalies and to deal with particular cases—I do most emphatically press that as a rider to my bald resolution here. I say that the very difficulty that you have stated, of getting legislation through the House of Commons, ought to be a reason why this Conference should approve this resolution to strengthen the hands of those who are desirous of bringing the British mercantile marine up to the mark, and putting it upon a satisfactory basis. Our Commission said: "The decline of seamen is principally owing to the bad accommodation, insufficiency of the number of men employed," and so on; and we consider that one of the methods to insure their competency, and that there is a sufficiency of them, would be to give them comfortable decent quarters. For those reasons, I move this resolution.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: Mr. President, I support Mr. Hughes in this resolution, and I do so because I have given very considerable attention to the question of manning. I was also a member of Sir Edward Reed's Committee, and no doubt the different members present have had the opportunity of reading Sir Edward Reed's Report. It will be noticed that amongst the majority who signed the Report in favour of a manning scale, was one of the principal shipping owners of the United Kingdom—Sir Francis Evans, representing the Union Castle Line—and the majority Report was also signed by the Nautical Adviser to the Board of Trade, and also by the Secretary to the Board of Trade. This question of manning, I think, ought to be taken up. It does not affect the seamen so much on the larger vessels as it does on the ordinary tramp steamers. Now I know that it is a common practice with a tramp steamer to commence a voyage from the Tyne to the Black Sea with no intention whatever to proceed through the Suez Canal. When they get to the Black Sea, they sometimes get a charter to proceed from there to Bombay. Now they have only sent five or six firemen to do the stoking work, which they may be able to do in cold weather, but when that ship commences to go through the Suez Canal, those five or six men are expected to do the same work in tropical climates as they would have had to do in the cold climates. There are no extra men taken on board. Then, again, another thing to be taken into consideration, is the difference in the quality of the coal. They may get a class of coal in the United Kingdom with which it is perfectly easy for five men to maintain steam, but when they get out East and get an inferior kind of coal, it is simply "blood for money," for those men to have to do the work. In my opinion, this question should have been dealt with long ago, after a recommendation of a Committee in the year 1896, and here we are in 1907, and nothing has been done by our Parliament. I certainly support Mr. Hughes's resolution, because if Australia and New Zealand have thought it possible to have a manning scale, I have no doubt they had good reasons for making such a recommendation; and, as a matter of fact, I am informed that the manning scale is in operation in New Zealand already. The shipowner says "You cannot make a manning scale." Well, my reply to that is, how does the shipowner regulate the manning at the present time? It is all done by rule of thumb. One shipowner says five seamen are sufficient; another shipowner—a little more liberal—says, "I will give them seven." But I do not think men ought to be called upon to do excessive work without any regulation whatever. And may I also say this to the Conference, without taking up a great deal of time. Probably they are not aware of the large number of firemen who commit suicide on board of British ships—not only the British seamen, but the Lascar seamen and the Chinese, very often. If members of this Committee were to read the Board of Trade Returns of the deaths that occur on board British ships, they would see every month, probably, 15 to 20 men who commit suicide—they come up from the stokehole and jump right overboard. Mr. Norman Hill shakes his head, but all I can do is to refer him to the monthly Return of the Registrar-General, and he will see there this Return of men disappearing. Certainly, I say suicide; that may be—

MR. NORMAN HILL: 15 or 20 a month?

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I said 15 or 20 a month.

MR. NORMAN HILL: A month?