

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

MR. LEWELLYN SMITH : We could not assent to the motion as at present phrased.

THE CHAIRMAN : No. It is too ambiguous.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : What I wanted to say was this : that if it applies only to vessels owned, registered, or chartered to trade in the Commonwealth and New Zealand, it is quite unnecessary, because it has already been conceded here in the fullest possible way that we have the power to make laws for ourselves in this or in any other respect. Now, as to whether we should ask this Conference to affirm the expediency of making laws, I submit we are not here for that purpose at all. If there be a very good and sufficient international or Imperial reason why this should not be done, no doubt you yourself, or the representative of the India Office here, would let us know it without more ado. But I take it, that if Mr. Belcher's resolution merely applies to those vessels that are trading on the coast, within the meaning of the resolution already agreed to, then it is not necessary. If it means something more than that, I should be very glad indeed to support it, in spite of what my friend, Mr. Thomson, has said. Mr. Thomson has an idea that we are to be limited by the recommendation of the Royal Commission.

HON. DUGALD THOMSON : No.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : Now, that is not so at all. The recommendations of the Royal Commission only incidentally arise here, and because we there said that certain things shall only apply to New Zealand and the Commonwealth, it does not follow that here we may not say that it would be a good thing if such a principle were enforced on the British mercantile marine generally. I do not wish to labour the question at all; but I do think it would be a good thing if British seamen were employed, wherever that is possible, in place of Lascars, Coolies, or Chinamen. A very large number of vessels trading from the Commonwealth to places over-sea do carry whole coloured crews—the E. and A. Company, the China Steam Navigation Company, the B. I. boats, the Calcutta boats—nearly all carry coloured crews; and it would be a very much better thing for us if they carried British crews. If this resolution of Mr. Belcher's is confined to the Commonwealth and New Zealand I should be inclined to vote for its withdrawal. I would not vote against it, of course, but it is only saying the same thing twice. But if he will make it apply generally, I shall certainly support it, although I am quite free to admit that if the British representatives here—if you yourself, representing the Government—say that we ought not even to express a pious hope that the British Government might see their way to favour this, then I shall say no more. Because, of course, if the Government have made up their minds on this matter, no recommendation from us could do anything unless it were unanimous, which, of course, I readily concede it would not then be. I should like you, therefore, sir, to ask Mr. Belcher formally how far he intends this resolution to apply.

THE CHAIRMAN : I understand Mr. Belcher to intend that it should apply beyond the limits of the home waters of New Zealand and the Commonwealth.

MR. BELCHER : Yes; that is my intention.

THE CHAIRMAN : And that is your interpretation of your motion?

MR. BELCHER : Yes.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : Do I understand that you would say that the Imperial Government must not employ Lascars in Indian waters?

MR. BELCHER : No; not at all. I have already referred to one case where I think the stoppage of the employment of Lascar labour is highly desirable, that is in vessels trading from Australia regularly to Singapore and Calcutta. I have a case in my mind where a steam vessel came to New Zealand not long ago with a cargo of guano from one of the outlying islands. I believe that vessel ran two or three cargoes there to the detriment of New Zealand vessels, and not only to their detriment, but it practically ran vessels sailing from Australia out of the trade altogether.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : That is not what I wanted to get at. If this is to apply only to certain places you must put it in the resolution, otherwise it will apply everywhere. I agree with you that there are certain places

where it is desirable that coloured labour should not be employed, if we can so get it agreed to, but I cannot think that we can prevent the Imperial Government employing coloured labour all over its dominions.

THE CHAIRMAN : Unless we are prepared to give up India, and all places where we have coloured subjects, it would be impossible.

HON. W. M. HUGHES : I will suggest to Mr. Belcher one modification which he might agree to. He names Lascars, Coolies, and Chinamen; what he really means, of course, is coloured labour; he does not bother whether they are Lascars, Coolies, or Chinamen. I quite agree with Mr. Thomson that there is no good purpose to be served by emphasizing this matter, and if Mr. Belcher persists in his motion, which I certainly shall not take exception to, he should withdraw those words "Lascars, Coolies, and Chinamen," and substitute the words "coloured labour."

MR. BELCHER : I am quite willing to allow the words "coloured labour" to be substituted.

THE CHAIRMAN : There is no substantial difference there. The whole point is whether this is proposed as a resolution governing legislation within the home waters of the Commonwealth and New Zealand, or whether it is intended to be applied all over the Empire.

MR. BELCHER : No.

THE CHAIRMAN : Or beyond territorial waters.

MR. BELCHER : It is stated here, "any vessel owned, registered, or chartered to trade in the Commonwealth or New Zealand."

THE CHAIRMAN : If you mean trading within the territorial waters then it is absolutely unnecessary, and outside that we could not possibly accept it. Sir James Mackay will speak on the subject.

SIR JAMES MACKAY : I do not think I have very much to say. It is unnecessary for me to go into the question of whether Lascars or Europeans are the better sailors. That has been thoroughly well threshed out in another committee, the report of which I think you have before you. But I would strongly urge this Conference not to adopt a resolution which is worded as this resolution is worded. It is a great reflection upon 200 or 300 millions of the King's subjects, who are just as loyal, just as law-abiding, just as industrious, just as sober, and just as good citizens as we are ourselves. I should like to point out to Mr. Belcher that if this resolution is adopted it would place vessels belonging to Australia under a serious disability. No vessel belonging to Australia, according to what Mr. Belcher said, would be able to go to Calcutta, Singapore, or China except with a European crew.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : Go from where?

SIR JAMES MACKAY : From Australia—a vessel owned in Australia. He proposed that no vessel owned or registered in Australia or chartered to trade there—

THE CHAIRMAN : It might be a British ship.

SIR JAMES MACKAY : Yes.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : I do not think under our laws she would be allowed to go away without a white crew.

HON. DUGALD THOMSON : Oh, yes, if she was going out of our waters.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : When she leaves the Australian coast I do not think she would be allowed to go without a white crew—not if we could stop it, at any rate.

SIR JAMES MACKAY : Surely, an Australian ship going up to Calcutta, an Australian owned ship, can sign on a crew in Calcutta and trade between Calcutta and other places. There is no law to the contrary.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : If we could stop it, we would.

SIR JAMES MACKAY : If you did stop it, what I would like to point out is that you would place your own ships under a great disability.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : I do not agree there, at all.

SIR JAMES MACKAY : You drive a trade, which is carried on now by vessels owned in Australia, to other