

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

HON. DUGALD THOMSON : I do not think it does, because that latter part does not free the master. As master he is not freed. It may free him as owner, but not as master.

SIR JOSEPH WARD : I desire to say that upon the understanding that it is not assumed that we are compelled to legislate line for line with this document which is here, I do not want to take up further time by offering opposition to anything.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : I am advised by my officers that it would be an unwise thing to alter the law.

THE CHAIRMAN : You cannot see your way to accept the convention at the present moment?

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : Not at the present moment.

THE CHAIRMAN : In that case we had better pass no resolution.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : I would prefer not, because at the present moment it is a legal matter to some extent, and I am advised that it is unwise to do it, so that I should be placed in a very invidious position if I gave my consent on behalf of Australia.

THE CHAIRMAN : We withheld our assent to these conventions until we had consulted the colonies first of all. At the suggestion of the British delegate, a third meeting will be held to consider any amendments which may be proposed, so if we could get any suggestions from the colonies we could bring them forward at that third meeting.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : When will that take place?

THE CHAIRMAN : The Belgian Government are to summon a meeting in the spring. There will be a third meeting held. We have not assented to this convention until we had the views of the colonies upon it. We have sent it along, and now we know fairly well what the position is so far as the colonies are concerned. A third meeting will be held, summoned by the Belgian Government, some time this spring, and I should like to have any suggestions on the subject which can be brought forward then with regard to the convention. In the meantime I think we had better pass no resolution.

SIR JOSEPH WARD : I think so. I shall be glad to communicate with you after my return to New Zealand.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : I think I shall very likely communicate before this Conference concludes.

THE CHAIRMAN : If possible we should like to have it, because they have promised to summon a Conference in the spring. I do not know what that means.

MR. LEWELLYN SMITH : At this third meeting there will be apparently the chance of considering it further?

THE CHAIRMAN : Perhaps you would like to know the countries which have assented to the convention. They are Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Chili, Cuba, the United States of America, Mexico, Roumania, Russia, and France.

MR. PEMBROKE : Considering our interests are very much larger, I think it would be nice if the colonies could see their way to come into it.

THE CHAIRMAN : It is very desirable, no doubt, that we should have an international convention.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : I think I shall be able to let you know something more about it.

THE CHAIRMAN : Now that Sir James Mackay has arrived, I think we can take Mr. Belcher's motion. Mr. Belcher will explain it.

MR. BELCHER : I move, "That this Conference is 'opposed to the employment of Lascars, Coolies, Chinamen, or persons of any other alien race on any vessel owned, registered, or chartered to trade in the Commonwealth or New Zealand.'" The object of the resolution is to try as far as possible to keep what I may term the blight of the Asiatic as far away from Australia and New Zealand as may be. You are all aware that the policy of the Commonwealth of Australia is distinctively

white. That sentiment has been clearly pronounced in Australia. It has been expressed right throughout their recent legislation. New Zealand, although it has not spoken quite so loudly as Australia, certainly holds generally, I think, the same opinion—that it requires white people for its country; in fact, it wants race purity, and it also wants its vessels manned with white labour. There are, I believe, certain vessels trading out of Australia, running pretty regularly between Australian ports and to Singapore and Calcutta and other places in the East, which are manned with the class of labour mentioned in the resolution. I regret very much to say that New Zealand is also troubled in a small degree with exactly the same complaint. There is a vessel owned by the Union Company which trades generally between New Zealand and Singapore and Calcutta. For some considerable time that vessel in that trade was manned with white labour. For some reason best known to the people who operate that company, the manning was changed from that of white to black, and she now runs regularly between the countries mentioned manned with black labour. We have not in our legislation anything restrictive as against the shipowner from employing aliens of any description. As I say, Australia is moving in that direction, and I think it highly essential that exactly the same thing should be done in New Zealand. The reasons for excluding this class of labour are very numerous. They have been already very ably expressed by Sir William Lyne, and, generally speaking, we look upon these people as undesirable, and that where Australian and New Zealand ships are concerned, where the profits accruing to the people who run those businesses are all practically derivable from the white population of those countries, we consider that the white community there who are desirous of following the sea as an occupation should have an opportunity in that direction as an outlet for their energies. There is no telling when once this policy is commenced where it is going to stop. It might be extended to the coasting trade. In fact, we know many years ago in Australia, there was a certain shipping firm there which had the whole of its fleet manned with Chinamen. Public sentiment got so strong in connection with the matter that they had to dislodge the whole lot of them and deport them out of the country. There was no gradual removing of them in that case. They simply had to do it in one act. That is the sentiment which prevails in Australia and New Zealand with regard to the employment of these people. I do not know what justification there is for employing them, except that they are cheap, for they are in a great many instances unreliable. It is the matter of cheapness, I think, which induces the employment of these people, because I know that when the vessel to which I have referred was manned by white labour under New Zealand conditions, the wage bill for the seamen and firemen was about £166 a month; with the employment of Lascars, the wage bill now, although there are double the number of men carried, is somewhere about £60 a month, making a difference of about £100 a month in the wages, with double the number of men carried. Apart from that altogether, both Australia and New Zealand have legislation in this respect, that a bond has to be given of £100 a head for the safe return of these people on board their ships. That, to my mind, is very repugnant indeed, and I cannot help saying that it appears to me, from my knowledge of this subject, that these people are in a servitude which no white person in the world would possibly submit to. They have no liberty of any kind. Contracts are made with these people for lengthy periods, and they are practically the property of the shipowner from the time they contract with them until the contract is finished. As I say, there is species of servitude about this kind of labour which closely borders on what I can only term slavery. I am very pleased to have heard Mr. Hughes the other day express the opinion, and express it very pronouncedly, that the Commonwealth is opposed to employment of this class of labour in any kind of British ship, and I was also very pleased to hear him say that the Commonwealth Government was hardly likely under the circumstances to grant a subsidy to any vessels, with regard to mails or otherwise, which carried this class of labour. I sincerely trust that the Australian Government will insist upon that principle.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE : You may depend upon it they will.

MR. BELCHER : And I hope that New Zealand will adopt exactly the same practice. It appears to me that representations to the people who employ this class of labour are practically useless. They are on the increase—there is no doubt about that. The figures show conclusively