

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

that this class of labour is on the increase in the various British vessels. We in New Zealand, at any rate, want to keep New Zealand for the New Zealanders, or for the British at any rate, as far as we possibly can, and, as I said before, it is highly desirable that we should have some restrictive legislation on our statute-book prohibiting the employment of this class of labour. There is a moral side to this question also. It is a well-known fact that these people cannot have social intercourse with the people of the countries where they trade, and I say the moral aspect of the question should weigh with us very considerably indeed, so far as the employment of these people is concerned. Race purity, I maintain, so far as our countries are concerned, is a thing which we intend to insist upon, and all the undesirables that we can possibly exclude from the country are going to be kept out. As a matter of fact, they are kept out of the country; but, unfortunately, they are allowed to come on board our ships, taking the place of white men who are willing to work and who, perhaps, have wives and families dependent upon them, and who are desirous of bringing their families up under decent conditions. They are displaced, and the cheap, and undesirable Lascars and Coolies are in their place. They are not in my opinion, speaking as a practical seaman, reliable men at sea, and I sincerely trust that it will never be my fate to be on board one of the liners if any accident should happen there, and to be at the mercy of assistance from the Lascars and Coolies. Only a few weeks ago, on the voyage from Australia here, I saw an exhibition of their ineptitude which was appalling. A certain performance has to be done before a vessel enters the Suez Canal. The boat was manned by five Lascars, and they were unable to do what was required, with the result that four white quartermasters had to go down and do what the Lascars were unable to do. I merely mention this as an instance of their unreliability. At any rate, the great and broad principle involved in connection with this matter is this: are our British ships to be manned with Britishers, or are they to become the dumping ground for the surplus population of the East? It has been stated here, very truly, that the mercantile marine may possibly at some time be the recruiting ground for our fighting forces. As a matter of fact, a good deal of activity is being displayed, both in Australia and in New Zealand, in the direction of trying to form a naval reserve. It is in operation at the present time, and there are a considerable number of New Zealanders, whom I know personally, who have become members of that reserve. As I said before, if the extension of this policy of the employment of the Lascar and Coolie is going to take place, then you can say good-bye to any possibility of establishing your reserve, and you will also not have a class of people which will be useful to us in the day when trouble may come along. I certainly trust that the Conference will pronounce with no uncertain sound that we believe in a white Australia and a white New Zealand, and that this class of labour should be excluded from the vessels.

MR. MILLS: May I say a few words on this matter? The company with which I am connected has been referred to by Mr. Belcher. I do not want to prolong the discussion, but I think I should say a few words, although I may say at the outset that I think, as put by Mr. Belcher, it is purely a local New Zealand matter, and is not a suitable thing for this Conference to come to a resolution upon. He asks us to legislate for Australia and New Zealand, which it is beyond the province of this Conference even to make a recommendation upon. I am not here to defend coloured labour in any way as regards the Australian and New Zealand trade; in fact, there is no stronger supporter of white labour than myself. I look upon all that has been said in that direction from a sentimental point of view with favour, and I am a great believer in it. Mr. Belcher has referred to one steamer trading from New Zealand, which formerly had a white crew, and after some experience in that direction was supplied with a Lascar crew, which he says is not so efficient. I can only say that although he is right in saying that there is an economy in employing a Lascar crew as against a white crew directly, in the shape of wages, there is a very great deal more in the way of efficiency. The reason why a Lascar crew was put in was because the white men were not allowed by the authorities to do any work in the port of Calcutta, and as often as not a considerable proportion would be unfit for work at sea in hot weather. The efficiency of the ship was very much impaired. It was more for that reason than for any other that Lascars were substituted for a white crew.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Where was that?

MR. MILLS: In a vessel trading from New Zealand to Calcutta. Mr. Belcher has said that if the thin end of the wedge is introduced it is only a matter of time for aliens to be introduced into the coasting trade, but that is impossible; there is a manning scale which would make it impossible. I do not like to say so—it does not do to publish these things far and wide—but our limited experience is that under many conditions the conduct of these coloured men is not only exemplary, but compares more than favourably with the conduct of white crews under similar conditions. Under very trying circumstances with regard to work and weather we cannot always rely upon white crews being fit for their work, either from their physical conditions or from their own fault. I merely make these remarks by way of explanation, as I have been referred to. As I say, I indorse all that Mr. Belcher has said with regard to the desirability of confining the employment on vessels in the coasting trade in the colonies to our own countrymen.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: I entirely concur in the motion, and will support it if it goes to a division. The only two objections which I have heard raised with regard to the employment of white men instead of coloured men are these: one is that which has been referred to by Mr. Mills, that, not when the ship is at sea but when the ship is in port, and calls at a port, there is sometimes difficulty in getting the men on board again—much greater difficulty than there is so far as Lascars are concerned; more difficulty than there is with other coloured people also, but particularly the Lascars. There may be some little trouble in that regard, but I certainly think that if the men become more wedded to their ships and more satisfied with their conditions, that will lessen very much. Personally, I certainly think that if I was in any trouble, or the ship was in any trouble, I should feel much safer if we had a white British crew than if we had a crew of coloured men. As regards the stokehold and the climate, I know that that has been raised many times as the reason why coloured men should be employed in the tropics; and the vessel which has been referred to, trading from New Zealand to Calcutta, perhaps raises the question of their not being able to work in the stokehold. I have never heard the question raised except with regard to the stokehold. We have a good deal of traffic, and many ships, between China and Australia, in which they employ Chinese. I forget the name of the company, but the "Eastern" is one of the ships, and there are many. I am told it is the E. & A. Company, and the China Steam Navigation Company. I think there is a great deal too much made out of the assertion that white men cannot do their work wherever a black man can do it. We know perfectly well that men-of-war in the tropics do not employ black men, even when steaming at a higher rate of speed, and the white men can do the stokehold work. In the ships of the "Archer" class which came out to Australia, which are the very worst so far as the ventilation of the stokehold is concerned, white men did the work. If that is so, and if in every other regard the white men can do the work—Germans can do the work—why not white Englishmen? The Nord-Deutscher Lloyd do not employ black men, and they do not employ oriental people to do the stokehold work. Under all these circumstances I certainly feel that there is no reasonable objection to carrying a motion of this kind, which certainly does express the sentiment of Australia.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: I am very proud of the condition of shipping affairs in New Zealand, and I am not saying so for the purpose of paying a compliment to those responsible for the control of the ships trading around our coast. All the steamers which belong to New Zealand employ none but white people, with the one exception referred to by Mr. Belcher; and as a country we are strongly opposed to the system of the employment of Lascars or Chinese or coloured people upon our ships. It is only due to those responsible for the control of the great Union shipping line which trades to and from New Zealand, as well as its coadjutor, the Huddart Parker line of steamers which trade to our country, to say that they have voluntarily, without pressure from the Government, maintained all along white crews on board their steamers. Our country is very proud of it, and I think it is only fair to say on behalf of my colleague who is associated with Mr. Belcher and myself, Mr. Mills, the head of one of the great steamship companies, there, that the country itself has so far done nothing else but approve the spontaneous and voluntary efforts made in that direction by that organisation. Years ago we stipulated, in a contract where we gave a