

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

I cannot see why he should not get something direct, except that it may be they are afraid of his going on the spree. I do not know whether that is the reason. I say that a sensible man would not go on the spree. But at the same time I think it is very hard if a man cannot get something without going through all those byways of sending it to somebody else and getting that somebody else to send it to somebody else at another port. That seems a hardship. I feel that the sailor ought to be able to get something if he wants it, without going through all those channels. I presume that is what Mr. Belcher is aiming at.

MR. BELCHER: Undoubtedly. I think seamen should be treated exactly the same as any other workers.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: I will say that he is not quite in the same position, and if there is any dread that serious trouble may be caused you may reduce the amount of the proportion that may be paid, but that a man should go a long voyage and be unable to get anything at all when he gets to another port is, I think, a species of slavery; he is not a free man.

MR. MILLS: I must say I am very much in sympathy with this motion, although I think it goes too far. If it were altered in the direction that he should be paid not less than half his wages then due in any port he desired it would meet the case. It is an unreasonable thing that a seaman's wages should be kept back for two or three years, and even this provision in the new Act only permits him to send it to relatives. He may be a man without a relative, and may want a few pounds to spend on clothes or other things, and he cannot get it. We see more of it in the colonies, perhaps, than you do here. In some ships their lives are made so uncomfortable that they eventually clear out and leave their wages behind them; and we have heard of a case, in the evidence before the Commission, where the master boasted that for three years he had paid no wages at all. At any rate, during those three years the men had received little or no wages. I do not suppose there are very many numerous cases of that kind, but such should not be possible.

MR. NORMAN HILL: We think such cases should not be possible. Surely the law of any country must be in a very peculiar condition which could enable a man to make such a boast as that without being put in gaol.

MR. MILLS: The men get tired of it, and sometimes they quarrel among themselves, and they go and leave their wages behind them.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Under the new Act they can only be affected to the extent of £10.

MR. MILLS: No; a man can only get money for the purpose of remitting it to his relatives or to the Savings Bank, but he wants to spend it on the spot.

MR. NORMAN HILL: A dishonest master, such as the one you have instanced, cannot under the new Act rob a man to a greater extent than £10.

MR. MILLS: He can.

MR. NORMAN HILL: No. A man can have any money at any port above £10.

MR. MILLS: He can send remittances, which he does not want. He wants to spend the money on the spot.

MR. NORMAN HILL: The question is how much can the dishonest man rob him of. If the man chooses to say before he clears off, "Give me facilities to remit £20," or whatever it is owing to him over £10, and the master has to do it.

MR. MILLS: The men are not always guided by reason.

MR. NORMAN HILL: We are considering extreme cases. The practice in the Australian trade and the New Zealand trade has been quoted. It is the practice here in our coasting trade to pay the men weekly, and it works very well.

MR. BELCHER: That is only in the case of what are known as weekly vessels.

MR. NORMAN HILL: That is in our coasting trade—in the home trade. Now when you come to over-sea trade you have the position that the man is in one port

and his dependents are in another. The point was most carefully considered last autumn; we debated it in every way; we were most anxious to do what was fair and right by the seamen; we were most anxious not to increase their difficulties, and our difficulties, in ports, such as San Francisco, for instance, where we know the men are reckless and are robbed; and we devised the best scheme, with the help of Mr. Havelock Wilson, to meet that kind of case. It seems to me that it would be most unfortunate to make any general recommendation that a man, when he is out of this country, away from his dependents, should be entitled to draw his wages as he pleases. Of course, on the well-managed ships a man gets his necessary pocket-money as a matter of course; it is never refused him on well-managed ships.

MR. MILLS: Oh, yes.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: He is not entitled to it, but they give it to him.

MR. NORMAN HILL: Now we have strengthened that to provide against the badly managed ships, and the dishonestly managed ships, so that the dishonesty is limited now to the extent of £10. I should have said it was a very extreme case in which it was worth any captain's while to drive the men off the ship in a foreign port for the sake of stealing £10 from him when he knows that to find a substitute for that man will almost certainly cost him more than £10.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Do you not think a man should have some right?

MR. NORMAN HILL: We are giving him full rights except as to £10.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I would like to ask Mr. Norman Hill one question.

MR. NORMAN HILL: May I add one other point. Last autumn we went one step further, and said that any money left in the possession of the ship by the men who had left no longer goes to the shipowner; it goes to the Government; and under penalties we are bound to remit to the Government all those forfeited wages. That is under the Act of last Session.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Under the last Act?

MR. NORMAN HILL: Yes. There is no possibility of our making any profit out of it. Whether we are right or wrong in taking a fatherly interest in the way the men spend their money, all I can say is, that we have had the help of Mr. Havelock Wilson in devising the scheme, and I understand he is anxious that the scheme should be tested before we go to any new departure.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I would like to ask this. I can quite see what Sir William Lyne has said, and I agree there is a good deal of hardship in it. If a ship is in Sydney and a man has £20 due to him, and wants some money to purchase clothes, before he can get that £20 he has got to send it home to somebody in England, and get that person to send it out, and that is a hardship. Would the shipowners be prepared to recognise that a seaman should receive, say, £10 of his wages, by a note in Sydney, so that he could go to the Seaman's Union in Sydney and hand that note over to them, and say, "I have £10 due; you might pay me that £10, and collect it from the owners." Would the owners in England be prepared to honour that note if it was cashed by the Seamen's Union in America, or Australia, or New Zealand, or anywhere else? Then the men would have the money at once to spend if they wanted it. Would the shipowners be prepared to do that?

MR. NORMAN HILL: As it stands now, we are bound by the Act of Parliament to give him facilities to remit.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: It would be remitted. That amount would be remitted by the Seamen's Union to England for the owners to pay. Would the shipowners honour that note if it was transmitted by the Seamen's Union? I think that is a reasonable proposition. It would not be paid until after the ship had left.

MR. NORMAN HILL: By the same mail by which we remit the money the seaman could also remit the