

## REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

order to the Savings Bank, I know nothing to stop that.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I mean, if the man got an order which would not be payable until the ship left that port, of course, he could not draw it. That order has to be sent to England for collection. Suppose the Seamen's Union in Australia, New Zealand, or America said, "Very well; that note is all right" (or he could go and see the captain to see that it was all right), and then the men went to sea in the ship, having got the money in the meantime, and the Seamen's Union sent that note on to England for the owners to honour, would the English shipowners honour that note and transmit the money? Because that would be one way out of the difficulty?

MR. NORMAN HILL: There can be no question about it. We should have to send £20 to the Savings Bank. The same mail which takes the remittance to that bank could, if the seaman pleases, take his cheque on that Bank.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I only want an expression from the owners to that effect, because I can conceive it possible for it to be done if the owners would honour it.

MR. NORMAN HILL: It would be for the Bank to honour, not for us.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: Not necessarily.

MR. FERNIE: If the Sailors' Union will honour a man's cheque in Sydney, the Bank would have to pay; it would have nothing to do with the shipowner. I would like to say one word. It seems to me, as far as Australia is concerned, there is no practical difficulty with regard to this. We find that the crews there invariably get a considerable portion of their pay, and, furthermore, there have been very many cases where there have been some complaints against the captain, and in such cases the crew have applied to the local courts, and in every case they have had an order from the court to have the Articles rescinded, and the captain has been obliged to pay their wages.

MR. BELCHER: That is only in gross cases of breach of contract, and the man has to prove it right up to the hilt before that can be done.

MR. FERNIE: Our view is, that these decisions are always in favour of the man.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: In supporting this, I would like to say that the Royal Commission gave this considerable attention, and took a great deal of evidence, particularly in Newcastle, which I think deals with overseas shipping more largely than any other port in the Commonwealth—I mean there is very little coasting shipping there. We found a condition of things, with regard to crimping in connection with overseas shipping, which was most extraordinary, and even disgraceful.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belcher read that part.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: I want to say that almost all those persons who were called gave it as their opinion that one method of putting down crimping would be to pay the wages of the men, and that the men deserted principally—not entirely—from the fact that they did not get any wages. We had, not one case, but quite a number, where men who were, perhaps, owed £60 took £5 and went off. Another man who was owed £20 took £2 to get paid off. One man, a boarding-house manager, was asked Question 2007: "The practice of the British in not giving any part of their wages, is that largely responsible for the number of desertions?" and he said "Yes." The American Consul, who gave evidence, said that practically there were no desertions from American ships; and Mr. Lambert, the Master of the Seamen's Home in Melbourne, points out that there is very little desertion from foreign ships, and a great deal from British ships; and upon being asked why, he said it was on account of the accommodation—the wages were lower on foreign ships, but the accommodation was better. He says the wages are lower but the general opinion is that the accommodation is better on foreign ships than on British. Besides this, the sailors on British ships do not get any money until the end of the voyage, and there is consequently no incentive at all for them to stay there. But when, if he deserts and ships on another ship, the pernicious system of advance notes

comes in. A man knows he can have a week's spree and a pound or two out of an advance note. He does not get what he has earned when he goes to sea. He gets what he has not earned when he deserts and ships on another ship. Of course, he is cheated all the time on shore by the people who cash advance notes. When he goes to sea, he has a month or so to work, and in another month's time he gets to a port. They won't give him any money, and he does the same thing again. The system is a pernicious one. A seaman is treated like a child. He should not get a penny until he has earned it, and when he has earned it he should get every penny. There could not be any more desertions than there are now. At the Port of Newcastle, at any rate, I can say that there are absolutely hundreds upon hundreds of desertions every year from British ships and hardly any from foreign ships. Now you know that wants answering. The German and the other foreign ships pay a certain proportion of the wages—the American and the German. I think we ought to do the same. Whether we should pay all or not is a matter of opinion. The Commission recommends two-thirds. I should be quite satisfied with that. Of course, there is no real reason why the seaman should be treated differently from any other workman; and this system of advance notes I disagree with entirely. I think the allotment note might be extended to relations and to relations only, and confined to them. The advance note ought to be abolished, and wages ought to be paid when earned. I feel sure that if they were paid there would be no desertions, or comparatively few. Where sufficient inducement is offered, no doubt a man will always desert. But this applies to all callings. Where sufficient inducement exists everybody would. I suppose a man would even desert a Government if he could get a better billet in another Government. I certainly would emphasise the necessity of an alteration in this matter. I believe it is a hoary tradition which belongs to the time when a seaman was practically a slave, and he is the only workman now who is treated as a slave and a child. He ought to be treated as a free man, and I shall certainly support Mr. Belcher. But whether he should get his full wages or two-thirds of them, as we recommend, is a matter of opinion.

MR. DUNLOP: It seems to me the discussion is all on the part of Australia. The object of the discussion seems to be to try to teach us how we are to do better than we are doing. Now, speaking for tramp ship-owners and sailing vessels, we, the owners of these vessels, feel that the law we in this country have recently passed already goes much too far. In the Australian trade and our own coasting trade there would be no objection to such conditions, because the ships can come and go to and fro back to the same ports, and we can therefore, if a seaman deserts, quite easily replace him. A good deal has been made of the difference between land employment and sea employment. Well, to me the difference is very obvious. If a ship-builder or a house-builder or anyone on land has men leaving from any cause whatever, he can very easily replace them because there are men near. The same thing applies to many coasting boats. But take the long distance vessel, take the steamer going to the west coast of America, say, to a place like San Francisco, where there has been an earthquake and men can earn quite easily £10 a month. I say it is very necessary for us to have some pull on the men. We have no desire to keep the men's money, but we want to keep the men and not allow them to go ashore and leave a valuable ship without a crew. I had a ship the other day in the Northern Pacific; she had to wait four weeks to get a crew, simply because wages were so high on the spot that the men cleared out.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: They do that under present circumstances.

MR. DUNLOP: You have said if they were paid their wages they would not desert. I cannot see how you can use such an argument. I am speaking from practical experience. For example, one of our vessels where the crew had misbehaved on the way out, and they raised a complaint in the San Francisco Court with a view to getting the wages, and the captain said "No"; and it was finally referred to the United States Courts, and the captain was highly commended, and the crew were told they could not get their discharge, and they remained on board and came home.