

4th Day.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[2 June, 1911.]

Mr. FISHER : He said so here.

The PRESIDENT : Not final in the sense that no further progress can hereafter be made.

Mr. FISHER : Certainly not; but we can only speak of the thing that is before us—the Declaration of London. We should have the right to raise the point and to bring it before you, and you the right to ask for a new Convention, and to discuss an improvement on that, and better it and revise it if you see the chance. But that is quite a different matter. We hold that it might be improved, and we hold with you in all your devices to improve it; but we find ourselves in this difficulty, and in a word we say this : While we cannot under the circumstances give our full approval to it, we shall go so far as not to oppose it.

The PRESIDENT : You do not dissent from it?

Mr. FISHER : No.

The PRESIDENT : May I take it the other members of the Conference are in favour of that resolution? [AGREED.] Then the resolution is carried, the Government of Australia abstaining.

Mr. FISHER : Yes.

The PRESIDENT : Perhaps you will forgive me if I leave the Chair. I am obliged to go to the House of Commons. It is the first time I have absented myself from the proceedings here.

The Right Honourable L. HARCOURT took the Chair.

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND BRITISH SHIPPING.

“ That it is advisable in the interests both of the United Kingdom and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas that efforts in favour of British manufactured goods and British shipping should be supported as far as practicable.”

The CHAIRMAN : Item No. 1 on the Agenda will be left over for further discussion after Whitsuntide, and we will begin with Item No. 2 : “ Commercial Relations and British Shipping.”

Mr. FISHER : The resolution is : “ That it is advisable in the interests both of the United Kingdom and of the British Dominions beyond the seas that efforts in favour of British manufactured goods and British shipping should be supported as far as practicable.” Members of the Conference must be aware that other countries give very special facilities to shipping, both by subventions and also contributions from national exchequers, to assist their ships in competition with British ships. We, in Australia, have helped to counter-balance that by legislation to facilitate our shipping in competition with them, but I would like to leave that matter to the Minister of Defence, Mr. Pearce, who will elaborate it a little more.

Mr. PEARCE : In 1906 the Commonwealth Government, acting on the lines of this resolution in dealing with the tariff, brought in proposals for preferential trade by which a preference of 5 per cent. was to be given to British manufactures with a view to encourage British shipping; and in order to do something to equalise the unfair conditions existing between British shipping and foreign shipping trading to Australia, they attached to the Bill which