

Mr. PEARCE—*cont.*

United Kingdom might very well consider the advisability of denouncing those treaties which stand in the way of the realisation of that idea by the Colonial Governments.

There is another feature of this case which will no doubt be advanced by the Government of the United Kingdom, and that is that we, in the Bill to which I have referred, debar from participating in its benefit those British ships which carry Lascar crews, or coloured crews other than European. The crews had to be crews of European descent. Lascars were not specifically mentioned, but the stipulation was that the crews had to be of European descent and British subjects. Now it is a well-known fact that there is a question which has been disturbing the minds of British statesmen for many years past, and that is the gradual decline of British seamen on British shipping, and their displacement on the one hand by foreigners and on the other hand by coloured men. That is a problem, of course, with which, as regards British shipping, this Conference is not concerned directly. It is again a question of policy with the British Government; but we would submit that when by Dominion legislation, which we claim we have the power and the right to pass, we endeavour to assist British shipping which is concerned wholly and solely in the Australian trade to the United Kingdom, it is not against the general policy of the British Government of doing even-handed justice to all sections of the Empire, white or coloured, and we should not be interfered with in carrying out that policy in the way which we think fit. The trade to which we referred was peculiarly and entirely Australian trade; it was not Indian trade, or China trade, or Japanese trade, or trade with any other Asiatic country, but it was peculiarly and entirely trade directly from Great Britain to Australia, because the goods made the subject of the preferential tariff had to be manufactured in the United Kingdom. If the goods were of foreign manufacture they could not get the benefit of the preferential tariff. While we do not ask that our view should be consulted at all with regard to legislation by the United Kingdom on those subjects, we do ask that opportunity should be given to Australia to carry out her view and assist British shipping in the way we have indicated. We think that is a fit subject to be discussed at this Conference in view of the fact that possibly other Dominions may also wish to assist British shipping because we, in the outlying Dominions, feel that it is of vital importance to us that the fast merchant steamers around our coast should be owned either in Australia or in Great Britain, or by British capital, and that they should be manned by Britishers, because we know after the discussion we have had on the Declaration of London, we realise that these merchantmen may in time of war be turned into ships of war, and it would be a calamity, not only to Australia but to the Empire, if the British mercantile flag is to decrease in our waters and be displaced by subsidised foreign merchantmen carrying crews that are already trained in the arts of war, and therefore formidable enemies to us in a time of crisis. It is for that reason we bring forward the resolution, and those are the points which we wish to bring before the Conference for their consideration.

Mr. BUXTON: I was not aware what points would be raised on this resolution, and I did not know therefore that this particular point would have been raised in connection with it. But it having been raised perhaps the Conference will allow me to say a few words with regard to it.

The position which His Majesty's Government have taken up upon it is a twofold one. Mr. Pearce explained what was proposed by the Australian Act, and may I say, in passing, that as far as the object is concerned, we very much appreciate the desire of the Australian Commonwealth Government in reference to this matter—namely, to assist the British shipping in connection with the Colonies, and as far as possible to give an advantage to British shipping over foreign shipping in the Commonwealth. As far as the object is concerned, therefore, we are obliged to the Commonwealth for what they have done and what they were desiring to do. But the question had to be considered not only from the point of view of British shipping in connection with the Commonwealth, but we had to look at it from the point of view of British shipping all the world over.

Mr. Pearce said that the point was taken—and he is correct in saying so—that we, in agreeing to this proposed Act of the Commonwealth would have conflicted in many respects with some of our treaties with other nations, and