

4th Day.]

NAVIGATION LAW.

[2 June, 1911.]

Mr. BUXTON—*cont.*

stitutional positions which the Home Government are bound to take up in reference to those matters of shipping and other questions of that sort. As far as the official communications are concerned, they are always of a confidential nature. As far as we are aware, they are kept confidential—that is to say, they are not brought out into the public purview as far as we are concerned with any object of bringing pressure, as Mr. Pearce seemed to imply, I think, to bear on the Dominion Government, with a view to altering their view or bringing pressure to bear in connection with a Bill they might have before them. There is certainly no such intention, and as far as we are concerned our communications are intended to be direct through the Governor to the Ministers, and not to the public concerned. I think Mr. Pearce should remember that in those matters, especially the ones to which he has referred, there are also great interests concerned which are not simply the interests of the Dominion or the Commonwealth, whichever Dominion it may be. And as regards the shipping trade here, we are bound to consider and to make representations to the Government in reference to a trade which represents about 87 per cent. of the whole compared with the small percentage of any of the particular Dominions. I want to emphasize what Mr. Harcourt has said in reference to this matter, that the desire in making those communications to the Governments concerned is that we should arrive at an amicable decision if possible beforehand, with a view to uniformity and to a workable Act, rather than after the Act is passed, when it becomes obviously, I think, much more difficult for either side to come to a satisfactory arrangement. It is really with a view, as the Colonial Secretary has said, to arriving at an amicable agreement beforehand that these communications are made; and I am bound to say that I think it would be inexpedient, as far as we can judge, if these communications were not made beforehand rather than afterwards. They are always made in a friendly spirit, with a view, if possible, to avoid friction and to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. Whenever we have to make communications with foreign Governments with regard to these matters the communications are made beforehand rather than after.

I am willing to accept this resolution on behalf of His Majesty's Government, subject to the suggestion which I made to Mr. Fisher, which is this: I do not think we could agree to the words, "The present state of the navigation laws in the Empire," as we ourselves here have no navigation laws; it is opposed, as the Conference knows, to our whole policy to have them, and it looks a little as if it was intended, if we accepted these words as they stand, that we should be committed to an expression of opinion that we should have navigation laws here as well as in other parts of the Dominion. I suggest to him the words: "That it is desirable that the attention of the Governments of the United Kingdom and of the Colonies should be called to the desirability of taking all practical steps to secure"—that is really the object he has in view—and, instead of "to secure," "to promote" (it is merely verbal) "the employment of British seamen."

I should like, with the permission of the Conference, to read a memorandum—not a very long one—in reference to the attitude, or, rather, the action, we have taken on the various points raised in the resolution. I should like to have it on record that in these matters we at the Board of Trade and His Majesty's Government have not been remiss in our action with regard to them. As a matter of fact, Mr. Pearce has not actually raised the point, but, looking to the fact that this resolution is going to be accepted, I should like to have it on record what action we have taken.

Mr. FISHER: We do not know what it is.

Mr. BUXTON: It is in reference to the motion of the Commonwealth Government, which is to this effect—I need not read it again, but the points that they make are that we should adopt this proposal in order: (1) To secure uniformity of treatment to British shipping; (2) to prevent unfair competition