

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

the position of the Imperial Merchant Shipping Act and what was required here, but in the legislation we passed dealing with the matter in 1903 eighteen months elapsed before it was assented to, and the amending Act which we passed in 1909 (I am not dealing with the Act passed last year dealing with Lascars) has received a conditional assent only, subject to legislation regarding a clause in it; in reality it is not law yet, but, subject to a reservation as to the alteration of one clause of that Bill, the rest of it is agreed to. But I want to point out the difficulty that arises in a country like ours where we have to wait such a long time—eighteen months in one instance and nearly two years in the second one—to enable the desires and requirements of our own people to be put into statute law so as to enable our shipping operations to be carried on successfully in New Zealand, and I think there does want to be a broadening of the law to enable more powers to be given to us. We are in a very much better position, as far as New Zealand is concerned, to judge what suits our own people and to decide what legislation is necessary than the Imperial Government can be so far as the oversea Dominions are concerned. I am not raising at the present moment the issue of the employment of Lascars in steamers; that comes under a separate heading, and can be dealt with more conveniently later on. The matters we think we ought to have absolute power with respect to, and as to which there should be no difficulty about obtaining assent to our proposals, are on the question of the wages of seamen, the manning of ships trading from the Dominion to the neighbouring Dominions. That is a very important point, and I dare say Australia concurs in it.

We want to have complete power over the manning of ships trading between our country and the oversea Dominions. It may be far-reaching in its effect, but we want it because the conditions of life out in our country are so different to what they are in other portions of the British Empire where coloured people are employed that it means practically life or death to great local institutions with very large capital in them, with a large number of people employed, and a large number of dependants living on shore. We want to have the power of fixing the regulation of accommodation for seamen, and the survey of ships and their life-saving appliances. The Board of Trade has done splendid work in that matter, as far as my observation has gone, and I have watched it very closely from time to time, and they are doing good work, in my opinion, in connection with this very important matter that we are dealing with now; but in the proposal submitted by Australia directing the attention of the Government of the United Kingdom to various matters, I am merely indicating what it is that we feel it is essential we ought to have the undoubted right to do—namely, that which we believe to be the best in the interests of safety and the interests of the accommodation, both of passengers and seamen, and generally connected with the vessels trading from our country, and especially between the Dominions, which is very important from our standpoint.

Then we meant to have the fixing of the load-line and the regulation of the form and stipulations in bills of lading as to cargoes shipped from the Dominion, and we want to have the regulation with regard to proposals for the employment of Asiatics. We know that raises an important question which comes probably under the heading of emigration, which may be dealt with later on. The matter, however, is one of very great importance so far as we are concerned, and at this Conference I should like very much before we have concluded if we could be able to affirm some way in which this very troublesome question of the Asiatic could be met in a dignified way as far as the Asiatics themselves are concerned. They are entitled to consideration; they are proud people, and have the right to be considered in many ways. I believe we ought in a friendly way to pass some resolution at this Conference before we rise expressing our opinion as to how this great and important question may upon high lines be dealt with in the interests both of the Asiatics and of the Britishers.

I am not insensible to the fact that there are many difficulties standing in the way of a great Empire such as this in governing shipping, permeating as it does the wide world, and dealing with the people who are required for the various trades on account of climatic conditions and others to man them. At the same time, while recognizing all that, we want to see our own country protected in the fullest way possible from the inroad of a system which I believe