

15 June, 1911.]

NATIONALIZATION OF THE ATLANTIC CABLE.

[9th Day.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER—*cont.*

discussed and adopted, I, for my part, reserve my judgment upon this resolution. It may be we may have to come to that in the end, but at the present time my feeling is—so far as the Government I represent is concerned—that we would prefer to see the result of the negotiations and legislation entered into by Mr. Samuel before we commit ourselves to the purchase of the existing telegraph lines.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I would like to say that the very important statement made by Mr. Samuel does alter the position to this extent: It has gone in the direction of lowering the rates, which can only be finally put upon a satisfactory basis, in my opinion, by Great Britain and the overseas Dominions owning the cables from the Old Country to the various outlying portions of it. I want to make it quite clear, as far as I am concerned, that I believe that the right course to follow is to nationalize the cables, and I should not like the fact of my regarding the statement made by Mr. Samuel as being very satisfactory and the acceptance of it—and rightly so—by this Conference as in any way causing an impression to exist that the final alternative should not be the acquisition of the various cables; because I believe, in the interests of the Old Country and of the outlying portions of it, it is far and away the strongest course to adopt. At the same time, I think I should be wanting on my part if I were not to say how highly I appreciate what has already been suggested by Mr. Samuel on the part of the British Government, which I think is a step forward of a very important character indeed. But I want very briefly just to say what I desire to put on record with regard to this Atlantic Cable proposal. This extract from the report, dated 26th January, 1906, from Sir Sandford Fleming to the Secretary of State for the Colonies historically puts the position in a way that meets my ideas, and I would like to repeat it. He says: "More than a hundred and thirty years ago the great and gifted Irishman, Edmund Burke, and the illustrious U.E. loyalist, Joseph Galloway, on opposite sides of the ocean, each had visions of a mighty Empire: more than fifty years ago its organization was a dream of the great Canadian, Joseph Howe. Since then it has been the dream of other great men of various races, in various British communities, and in yearly increasing numbers. For a generation back Imperial Federation Leagues, British Empire Leagues, and other associations have been formed with the avowed purpose of converting the dream into a reality. The goal has not been reached; but if the desired results have not followed, these several agencies have done much to awaken the spirit of union which now to so large an extent prevails."

I want to say that this question of cable communication is, in my opinion, of far greater importance from the point of view of the union of the Empire than the mere advantage of obtaining concessions across the cables, though they are most important from the standpoint of bringing the people closer together; and I believe, if it were possible for us to arrive at a decision that we were prepared to take over the private cables and pay their market value to the owners, it would be one of the finest things for the Empire that has ever been done; and between the Old Country and the overseas countries the cost of the cables, with their earning power recognised, which would be a good commercial transaction to commence with, would do no injury to the shareholders of those private companies, and would be following a policy which the British Government here adopted long ago of owning the means of communication by telegraph, and which most of the overseas countries have also adopted. My opinion is, that the best means by which the business and the news of the world could be conducted between the overseas countries and the Motherland itself, and the right thing for the Old Country and the overseas countries to adopt would be to own the cables. Take this question in connection with the important resolution which Mr. Pearce is moving, as to communication right through to the countries in the southern seas. My friend Sir Wilfrid Laurier knows that in Canada an arrangement has been made with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for the use of telegraph lines across Canada, which is, as far as it goes, of a much more satisfactory character than existed prior to that arrangement being made. The position Australia occupies, and New Zealand occupies, with regard to its telegraph lines, can hardly be said to be analogous to the position of the overland line across the territory