

9th Day.]

NATIONALIZATION OF THE ATLANTIC CABLE.

[15 June, 1911.]

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

of Canada. If Canada owned that telegraph line itself, then, on all fours, they would be in the same position as we are as users of the cables and the lines from the Old Country to the overseas portions of it, instead of having a part that is privately owned—because, after all, the Canadian Pacific Company, enormously important as it is, is a public company privately owned by private individuals. If the Canadian Government owned that length of line, they would be in the same position in Canada as the people of Australia and New Zealand are. We undertake the receipt and delivery of any messages *en route* along our lines in Australia as a Government matter, and, judging by the information placed before me, in a rather more advantageous way than can be done over a private-owned system of telegraph lines. I am not suggesting for a moment there may not be extraordinary difficulties in the way of that becoming part of a State-owned system, and I think in the meantime it is satisfactory to have had that arrangement which has been brought about through the good offices of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and to that extent it is a move forward and in the right direction. But the fact of our not owning that particular portion of land line does not to my mind justify our not urging with all the force that we can the laying down of a cable across the Atlantic. I am not going to allude, in the course of the remarks I am making, to anything that may be regarded as private, so I will not refer to any companies specially as to what the proposals between this country and America or Canada may be. But what I would like to know is, who owns the cables across the Atlantic? Are they owned by British companies, or are they owned by companies outside Britain? If they are owned by British companies, then it ought to be possible, if they are not willing to sell at the value of their cables in the market to-day, for us to agree to say we would be prepared to purchase them at a price upon the lines I indicate; or, if they are not agreeable to sell to us, as an alternative to put down our own cable. The estimated cost referred to by Mr. Pearce, of 600,000*l.*, includes the land line. I leave that out, because at present we have an agreement with the Canadian Pacific Railway, and until that expires, we need not trouble ourselves about the estimated cost of 120,000*l.* for a land line. My opinion is it would cost more for the overland line, but that is neither here nor there. Supposing it cost 500,000*l.* to lay a cable across the Atlantic between the different countries, after all, the financial side of it is, to my mind, a very satisfactory one. Our proportion of contribution towards the creating of the finance, the providing of a sinking fund and all the expenses upon that basis, turned into the position of a subsidy, would be a very small one indeed; but we would immediately control the whole of the rates across the Atlantic, and it would prevent the possibility of those Atlantic cables coming under the control of combines either inside or outside the Motherland. I am talking of cables owned in the Empire between the Old Land and the oversea countries. When we come to cables owned outside our own country, as I believe all the Atlantic cables are, it is even worse. I think under those circumstances we ought by affirmation at this Conference to suggest the desirability of a State-owned link between Great Britain and the Continent of America being provided for.

I find here, from a reference to a compilation by Mr. J. Henniker Heaton not so very long ago, that the present capital at par value of the cable companies of Great Britain amounts to 27,982,000*l.*, and that the annual receipts of the cable companies, including subsidies, amount to 3,163,000*l.* It looks to me, from the standpoint of a great and important business proposition, that, if we were prepared to go into the question of nationalizing these cables, from the statement of the value of the cables and the earnings of them, including subsidies, it is not by any means a bad position from the standpoint of a great commercial undertaking providing important financial results upon the right side, and also from the standpoint—which I believe to be of tremendous importance—of Great Britain and the oversea Dominions owning these important cables. Here I want to quote another extract from the same report which, as far as I am concerned, meets my view in a very great way, and I propose to put it on record, because I believe it is—although we may not be able to do it at this Conference—what we ought to work for. The more it is put off the more it will cost the component parts of the Empire in the