

*9th Day.]*

DEVELOPMENT OF TELEGRAPHIC COMMUNICATION. [15 June, 1911.]

Mr. FISHER : There is one at Sydney, too.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : There is one at Sydney, too. Let us, if we can, agree that we should share the establishment of the link between the whole of us—the British Government, the Indian Government, the Australian Government, and the New Zealand Government—of the Singapore Station; it would not be very much for any of us to bear our part, and that would be helping on the Empire side. Speaking for New Zealand, we do not want you to suppose for a moment that we require you either to sustain a portion of the loss or to share the profit, as the case may be, of the local uses to which we are going to put our wireless stations, and if we came into the larger question of pooling the profits or losses for Imperial purposes, the corollary to that would be the pooling of the profits or losses for local purposes. That would be an invidious position even to suggest that any Government outside our own, which has its own stations, should be put into. I am inclined to think with Mr. Fisher that, provided that the details of these schemes are not imposed upon us by the affirming of a resolution of this kind, our own experts in the ordinary course of things should report upon them. In a general sense I support the whole proposal you are submitting, but I think upon the question of the division of the responsibilities we require, perhaps, to have a slight alteration made imposing upon us the establishment of our own high-power stations, to make it part and parcel of the whole system you are suggesting; and in turn we ought to recognise—I do so far as New Zealand is concerned—that it is a fair proposition that we should stand in, as far as Singapore is concerned, and do something to keep the link in existence, because that link is just as useful to us as to you.

If any proposals for establishing wireless stations by or in conjunction with a cable company were to be favourably entertained, I would ask that this reservation should be made, that where those wireless stations came into the zone of the Pacific cable there should be no such possibility as a competing cable company with the Pacific cable taking in wireless messages over its wires that should go over the Pacific cable; in other words, whatever feeders we can give the Pacific cable through our wireless stations as co-partners in the State-owned Pacific cable there, I think clearly it is our duty to see that business is given to the Pacific cable; and I should, as a matter of preserving the existing rights in the Pacific cable, ask that there should be no confusion in the proportions of the work which should be given to the Pacific cable. That is a detail which I apprehend, in the ordinary course of events, could easily be arranged.

If we get to the time when the erecting of these stations is to be carried out, I think it ought to be competed for publicly, and if any particular company whose system is acceptable is the lowest, or if any competing offer is not satisfactory, then I think the work should be handed over to the Admiralty and carried out under the experts. In our country what we have to guard against from a public standpoint, while making for an efficient system, is the possibility of paying too much for the establishment of stations in any part. However, that is a point again which, I think, could be left to the British Administration to do what they consider right, and who also would report and would confer with us before committing us to any expenditure in connection with a matter of that sort.

Mr. FISHER : I just want to make our position quite clear in this matter. No Dominion is more heartily in favour of a British linking up of wireless than we are, only we have started our own scheme, and we intend to proceed with it, not only with these two stations, but a number of other stations on a great continent, and we feel a little out of humour because of the delay which has already taken place. We should have liked, as the Commonwealth, to have had some of the best wireless stations in the world established there; but owing to holding on, for similar reasons to those put forward now, until we once get a system for the whole Empire, we have been delayed, and the Commonwealth of course reserves to itself the right to put the stations where they please and how they please. But you may rely upon it, that once the scheme is developed and our financial obligations known, the Commonwealth will enter into full co-operation for strategical and protective purposes, and for commercial purposes