

9th Day.]

DEVELOPMENT OF TELEGRAPHIC COMMUNICATION. [15 June, 1911.

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

About 18 months or two years ago a Wireless Conference took place in Melbourne, and at that Conference there were representatives of the various countries, including, I think, Fiji, but at all events we had a representative in Australia, and it was agreed there by resolution to establish a system of Pacific wireless stations, and apart from anything we are doing in New Zealand now we agreed to combine with those countries who were favourable to that proposal so as to have a well-devised system of wireless stations not more than essential to carry on the important work of the Pacific Islands. I understand that the Home authorities favour the girdling of the Empire to some extent with a system of wireless stations, and if it could be made to fit in with what we are carrying out in our country now—Australia is also carrying out a wireless system independently of us—it seems to me that it would be a splendid alternative route in times of war, particularly where no interference could take place with the shore wireless stations, so that in the event of the cutting of the existing cables there would be the alternative of being able to carry on the work by wireless stations, which would be very valuable indeed. The Conference which took place in Melbourne in 1909 agreed to extend the wireless to the Pacific, and I think it would be a very fine thing in the interest of all parts of the Empire from a national as well as a commercial standpoint; as well as giving those now in isolated places an opportunity of being brought into touch with the world at large. I have pleasure in moving the motion.

CHAIRMAN: I think probably it would be for the convenience of the Conference if Mr. Samuel at once stated the position of the Government and the proposal they are prepared to make.

Mr. SAMUEL: In the opinion of the Government of the United Kingdom it is very desirable that a chain of wireless stations should be established within the Empire, partly for strategical and partly for commercial reasons. Cables, of course, are always liable to be cut in time of war. Wireless stations can be put in protected places, and, furthermore, the wireless stations are exceedingly useful for communication with the Fleet. On general grounds of Imperial defence we consider it is very desirable to have such a chain of stations. For commercial reasons also such stations might be of value. Wireless telegraphy at present is slow but cheap, and it is becoming more and more reliable, and the probabilities are that the progress of science relating to wireless telegraphy will lead to its being gradually more and more improved. Already the system of wireless telegraphy may be an effective means of securing or assisting to secure reasonable cable rates, and probably its influence in that direction will grow as years go on. We consider it, therefore, very desirable that such a system should be established. We also think it should be a State-owned system. If it were in the hands of a company it could not fail to be a monopoly, and in an even higher degree than the cables are a monopoly, because while it is possible to lay various competing cables it is exceedingly difficult to have competing systems of wireless telegraphy along the same route, on account of the danger of interference.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: In my resolution I mean a State system entirely.

Mr. SAMUEL: That I understood. Further, in the opinion of the Government of the United Kingdom, it is desirable that action should be taken speedily. But the Government do not think it would be wise at the outset to establish this system of wireless telegraphy in every direction simultaneously. We do not quite know yet what will be its commercial value. There is some doubt, and we think, in the first place, it would be advisable to establish the system along one of the routes, and the route which we would suggest is that from the United Kingdom to