

16 June, 1911.] COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND BRITISH SHIPPING.

[10th Day.

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

afford an opportunity to the other members outside the New Zealand representation of gaining experience of our affairs when passing through our country, and *vice versa*, which would be very valuable to them and very valuable to us. The same remark applies to other portions of the Empire that it will go through. For my part I think the suggested amendment by Mr. Harcourt is one that is essential to enable us to arrive at a unanimous decision upon a question of this kind, because in all our countries the fiscal system concerns the whole of us. We are committed to our respective fiscal systems, and I think no Commission should be empowered to suggest to any of us what our fiscal policy should be.

So far as I am concerned, I most cordially support the Resolution Sir Wilfrid Laurier has moved.

General BOTHA : I agree.

Sir E. MORRIS : Yes, I agree.

The PRESIDENT : Gentlemen, I think the Conference is very much indebted to Sir Wilfrid Laurier for making this very practical proposition. It will set up, as the result of the decision of this Conference, a body whose labours will certainly prepare the way, and possibly make the way plain, for effective and practical action by the next Conference ; and possibly before the next Conference meets for the legislation of the Governments of the different parts of the Empire. I think it important to emphasize that the proposed Commission is to be an advisory body with a reference as wide as words can make it, inquiring into all matters connected with trade, commerce, production, and intercourse between the different parts of the Empire ; and that it is not a Commission to suggest, still less to dictate, policies to the different Governments, either to the Government of the United Kingdom or to the Government of any of the Dominions. In regard to matters of policy we are, and must remain, our own masters. Nor do we seek advice ; nor would it be fitting for anybody outside to tender us advice in regard to large questions either of domestic or of Imperial policy.

I entirely subscribe to what Sir Joseph Ward said just now in illustration of what also was said this morning by Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Possessing as we do in this Empire every kind of fiscal diversity, each part of the Empire, by what I conceive to have been a most happy arrangement, having been left free and autonomous in the matter, we must be allowed to pursue, as from time to time the majority of our fellow-countrymen think fit, such fiscal policy as, in the opinion of that majority, is best suited to the requirements of the particular part of the Empire for which we are responsible.

Making that quite clear, let me say, in view of what Mr. Fisher said, that the intention is that this Commission should be what is called a peripatetic Commission—that is to say, that it should visit the different parts and not sit only in one. That is, I understand, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's opinion, and I entirely agree to it ; and in regard to its composition, I can assure him, so far as the Government of the United Kingdom are concerned, no pains will be spared to secure the services of the ablest and most representative men that we can, and the men that will command the greatest confidence, to sit upon it. I should be very glad, if it were possible, to adopt the kindly suggestion that a Minister of the Crown should take his seat upon it. It would be a most agreeable diversion—a change of scene, and a change of thought, and a change of occupation ; but I do not know altogether how our offices would get on in our absence from this country.

Mr. FISHER : It is wonderful how they get on without us.

The PRESIDENT : You are showing us how it can be done, and if we cannot follow your example, at any rate we are very grateful for your hospitable desire to see us in Australia—a desire which has been endorsed by the other representatives as far as their Dominions are concerned, and, if possible, we should only be too happy to visit you.