

10th Day.]

ALL-RED ROUTE.

[16 June, 1911.]

Mr. FISHER—*cont.*

The practical side, of course, as I understand it, must stand on its merits. As far as the All-Red route is concerned, I see no distinction at all between a service between Australia *via* South Africa to the United Kingdom and a route from Australia and New Zealand to Canada and the United Kingdom. With regard to the other route *via* Ceylon, the Suez Canal, Malta, Gibraltar, and the United Kingdom, of course that may have its defects from the All-Red proposition, but it has much to commend it, and as regards speed from our point of view I think it is much better than anything we can get through Canada. I do not wish, and I ought not, to criticise a scheme of this kind which has been put forward in a resolution in general terms, but I understand the proposition is that ships that are to start from Vancouver, I suppose, and to touch at Victoria, are not then to touch at any other point until Fiji, a distance of 5,200 nautical miles. That is a distance which, speaking as a layman, I think will take a very skilful engineer to provide a ship to carry coal and go at 18 knots. But that is only by the way. All who have spoken, Sir Joseph at any rate and Sir Wilfrid, have gone over that route; I have had the privilege of going twice over it and all the ships so far as I know touch at Hawaii and therefore the All-Red character of that route is in no better position than even the Suez route. As Sir Joseph Ward has said we subsidise a line of steamers for speed communication between Australia and the United Kingdom. We give a substantial subsidy, but we cannot get an 18-knot service for that. We are prepared to give a very large subsidy indeed to get an 18-knot service, and while the matter is here in the resolution by suggestion, and by the statement of Sir Wilfrid that you can be assured of an 18-knot service across the Pacific, it is not for me to say that it is not possible, but I should like to see the contract or the proposition of any company which would undertake it for a reasonable subsidy. That is our difficulty. While in the fullest sympathy with this proposition we in Australia cannot see our way to accept it in the terms laid down, nor to go into it, nor agree to it in the abstract until we see the proposition. Further, if any one will turn up the trade from 1905 to 1910, and see Australia's position as regards trade with the United Kingdom, they will see from the amount of exports from the United Kingdom to all the Dominions, that Australia has increased more largely—by a larger aggregate increase—than any of the others; in other words their total amount of trade is an increase of one-third of the whole. I will give you the figures, they are very few, of the imports from the United Kingdom.

The PRESIDENT: From the United Kingdom to Australia?

Mr. FISHER: I will give them to you from the United Kingdom to Australia to begin with. Taking the years from 1905 to 1910 the increase was from 17 million pounds in 1905, to $27\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds in 1910; South Africa was from 17 million pounds to $19\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds; Canada, from $12\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds to $20\frac{3}{4}$ million pounds; and New Zealand from $6\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds to $8\frac{3}{4}$ million pounds. Then the total imports from South Africa rose from $5\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds in 1905 to $10\frac{1}{4}$ million pounds in 1910; Australia, $27\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds in 1905 to $38\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds in 1910; New Zealand, from $13\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds in 1905 to 21 million pounds in 1910; and North America from 25 million pounds in 1905 to 26 million pounds in 1910. The total is 71 million pounds in 1905 and 96 million pounds in 1910. These are imports into the United Kingdom, so that there does not seem to be much the matter with the routes from Australia so far as the carrying of goods is concerned. As regards speed we are quite unable to see that the landing of mails would be greatly accelerated, and we are certain, so far as trade is concerned, that we cannot carry trade successfully by the route named. I think it will be admitted even by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and by Sir Joseph Ward that it is an impossibility to carry trade over practically 3,000 miles of railway. It is not a practicable proposition.

The PRESIDENT: Carrying goods you mean?