

10th Day.]

UNIFORMITY IN CURRENCY AND COINAGE LAWS. [16 June, 1911.

The PRESIDENT : With a man of your ingrained conservatism I think that is a very serious argument.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : It is not my resolution, Mr. Asquith.

The PRESIDENT : I am afraid there is very little possibility of making a practical change in this direction.

Mr. LLOYD GEORGE : We have tried it so often here.

The PRESIDENT : The difficulty is the opinions and habits of the British people.

The Resolution was withdrawn.

TRADE AND POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SHIPPING CONFERENCES.

“That concerted action be taken by all Governments of the Empire to promote better trade and postal communications between Great Britain and the overseas Dominions, and in particular to discourage shipping conferences or combines for the control of freight rates between the various portions of the Empire.”

Sir D. DE VILLIERS GRAAFF : The motion in the name of the Government of the Union of South Africa is as follows :—“That concerted action be taken by “all Governments of the Empire to promote better trade and postal communications between Great Britain and the overseas Dominions, and in particular to “discourage shipping conferences or combines for the control of freight rates “between the various portions of the Empire.” During the 1907 Session of the Colonial Conference discussions took place upon the subject of improving trade and postal communications between the United Kingdom and the overseas Dominions, and unanimous views were expressed in favour of concerted action being taken upon this important matter.

In no part of the Empire has a more clear demonstration been given than in South Africa of the evils and disadvantages that are suffered by all sections of the community through the lack of those facilities for ocean transportation that play such an essential part under present conditions in aiding the development and stimulating the trade and commerce of every country. We spend thousands of pounds in assisting agriculture in South Africa, but the expenditure to a large extent would be lost if our farmers could not get oversea transportation to the European markets at reasonable freights. It is not necessary for me to trace in detail the various stages in the evolution of the present situation as regards South Africa's seaborne trade. It will suffice, I think, if I outline the main features leading up to the position in South Africa as it stands to-day.

The shipping trade of South Africa is controlled by a body of steamship owners commonly known as the Conference Lines. Of this body the Union Castle Steamship Company is the wealthiest and most powerful member and practically dictates the policy of the combine. That the Conference Lines should have acquired the dominating influence that they now possess in regard to the shipping trade of the sub-continent is not surprising when it is remembered that, until the Union of the four South African Colonies was accomplished a year ago, there was no single Governmental authority which could negotiate with the combine.

As was only to be expected from such a state of affairs, the combine, presenting a united front, had little difficulty in imposing terms for the carriage of the imports and exports of the four separate Colonies which would not have been possible in any other circumstances. When the need arose the combine did not hesitate to play off the various Colonies one against the other. The strength acquired by the Conference Lines is due, in no small degree, to the fact that their most influential member, the Union Castle Company, has for many years held the contract for the conveyance of mails between the United Kingdom and South Africa. The annual subsidy paid in respect of this service has undoubtedly been a factor in establishing the Lines in their