

10th Day.]

TRADE AND POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS
AND SHIPPING CONFERENCES.

[16 June, 1911.]

Mr. BUXTON—*cont.*

may possibly be able to come to an agreement; but that is merely a pious hope on the part of the President of the Board of Trade.

As regards the action of His Majesty's Government in the matter, the motion I think refers to the question of postal subsidies. It has not been the policy of His Majesty's Government, rightly or wrongly, with regard to their postal matters to deal with postal subsidies as being anything except payments for postal facilities, and it has not been their policy to use that payment or those subsidies for anything except purely postal matters. Therefore some other way must be found to deal with the matter. I am afraid that all I can say on behalf of His Majesty's Government at the present time is that we think it is a matter of great importance, that we shall continue to give it the utmost consideration, and thus we shall still more await the developments to which Sir David has referred. These developments may throw some light on the best methods of dealing with the matter, if it is necessary to deal with it, and we shall, at all events, learn by experience, and we shall be better able to understand the matter at a later date.

Therefore, while agreeing with the resolution, and willing to accept it at the moment in the sense I have suggested, it must not be held that at any early date the Board of Trade will be able necessarily to deal with a matter of this sort by legislation, because in such a matter as this, as I have already pointed out, we cannot be much in advance of public opinion. Personally, I am hopeful that we may be able in some ways to take some action in regard to it, and I am from time to time, as far as my powers and opportunities go, endeavouring to ascertain the feeling here on the question. I hope Sir David and his colleagues will be prepared to accept my amendment in order to enable His Majesty's Government to give their support to the resolution, otherwise I am afraid I should have to dissent from it, on the ground I have given.

Mr. BRODEUR: Sir Wilfrid, as far as I am concerned, I do not see any serious objection to the motion which has been proposed by Sir David Graaff. I find, however, in view of the explanations given by Mr. Buxton, that it would be rather difficult for the Imperial Government to accept the motion unless some amendment was made. As far as Canada is concerned, we have not suffered a great deal at the hands of these Conferences. I may say, however, that a couple of years ago the Westbound Conference on the Atlantic, which covers not only shipping between Canada and Great Britain, but also shipping to the United States of America—at least, the ports of New York, Boston, and Portland—took action which was detrimental to some of our ports. The agents of the interested companies were generally opposed to that increased rate which was decided upon by this Conference, at least they said they had nothing to do with the passing of this resolution of the Westbound Conference, and were willing to help us in taking the necessary steps in order to remove it. Fortunately we were able to deal with that increased rate in such a way that they had to remove it, but that was through the local conditions and local circumstances, which perhaps cannot apply in all cases.

As a general principle, I think it would not be advisable that the Conferences which are made in restraint of trade should be encouraged, and I am sure Mr. Buxton, as President of the Board of Trade, will do his utmost to prevent any such thing being done. Since we are upon this subject, and since the motion as framed may permit me to bring up this question—because I see in the motion it is stated, "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," I might call the attention of the Conference to a very serious discrimination, and a very serious injustice which is done to Canada, not by a Shipping Conference, it is done by another Conference which exists—an agreement or combine which exists between insurers here in England. We found out that in all policies of insurance issued here there is a clause by which a ship is prevented going into British North America unless she pays a larger premium. This works very detrimentally to our interests in Canada, and we are at a loss to find out for what reason the insurers are charging a larger rate