

10th Day.]

TRADE AND POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS
AND SHIPPING CONFERENCES.

[16 June, 1911.]

Mr. PEARCE—*cont.*

of carrying perishable products. Members may think that that arises from one political party only, but I want to tell them that one of the first public men to take action and to speak publicly on this proposition was the late Senator Robert Reid, who was a prominent member of the Free Trade Party in Australia, and who was the President of the Australasian Chamber of Commerce; and it was at the yearly gathering of that body that he made a speech in which he advocated the Government entering into this particular business. More recently still, during last year, Mr. Graham, the Minister of Agriculture in Victoria, announced that if the export trade of the Commonwealth was to be advanced, in his opinion, the Commonwealth Government would have to put on a line of steamers to prevent producers being exploited and the profits of the makers taken from them by this Conference of Shipping.

It seems to me, therefore, that we have a right to ask this Conference to express an opinion, and we have a right to appeal to the Government of the United Kingdom, for we are not asking for any restrictions on trade, we are asking for freedom of trade, and we believe this constitutes a direct hindrance on shippers; it restricts their choice of ships; it restricts the ships coming to our ports; it acts against the interests of the United Kingdom; it acts in the interests of foreign countries, and especially those countries that have such legislation as we have in that it leaves their ports free, and we accordingly support the Resolution brought forward by South Africa.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Sir Wilfrid Laurier, I have listened to the speech of Sir David Graaff with a very great deal of interest, and I must say that the conclusion I came to upon hearing the position that he put forth was, that the people in the Union of South Africa have suffered a great deal over their shipping business. In our country years ago we went through not quite the same class of trouble, but we had to face a great deal of difficulty connected with the carrying on of the shipping trade of that country. I remember on one occasion, twelve or fourteen years ago, the Government guaranteed to provide freights by a certain line of steamers, in order to enable a satisfactory rate to be obtained for the conveyance of wheat from some of the ports in New Zealand to the old country. The result of that was, that there was an adjustment in the rates of freight which, upon the whole, was satisfactory to the shippers in the Dominion. We have had difficulties from time to time, but we have always met them locally by taking a course which we felt was sufficiently strong to enable us to have a position of affairs that suited the interests of the producers of the country.

In connection with a general Resolution of this kind, I am prepared to support it as amended, because I think the Resolution ought to be put on record in order to help our friends from South Africa to obtain what they are asking for; but I want to point out in connection with this matter, where in the interests of a country like New Zealand, I for one, at all events, require to be a little careful upon questions which may appear to be very easy of securing a settlement. We have four lines of steamers, all refrigerated, running in competition to this country for the conveyance of freight brought direct from New Zealand—not steamers passing through the Suez Canal, or steamers touching at Canada, but carrying our refrigerated produce in large quantities of sheep and frozen produce direct to the Old Country, and we do not give any contribution in the shape of a subsidy to any of them. They are all carrying on their business without Government support of any kind. We have got no less than twelve calling ports in our country which, from the geographical point as far as our producers, our settlers, are concerned, is very valuable to them. I know the condition of Australian trade quite well, and our class of trade, from the point of view of conveying our produce from New Zealand to the Old Country, is as different from what Australia's is as daylight is from dark. It is a perfectly common thing for any one of those refrigerating steamers to go to as many as seven, eight, and nine ports before they have completed their loading. It is not an uncommon thing on the outward voyage from England to New Zealand for shippers at the various ports, with that local sentiment which probably permeates all communities away from the towns, to ask to get their shipments