

11th Day.]

INDIAN EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION.

[19 June, 1911.]

sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

I listened to one part of Lord Crewe's speech with very considerable interest.

On behalf of His Majesty's Government he recognises the undeniable right of the oversea countries to decide for themselves whom they will admit as citizens of the Empire. I have already said—although I do not think that aspect of the matter comes up, though it is valuable to the whole of us to have the information Lord Crewe has delivered, in considering the difficult matter which has given rise to the notice of motion upon the Agenda Paper submitted by me—that that is one of the things that we stand out so strongly for in New Zealand; and indirectly if the question of the admission of either Asiatics or Indians or any of the other coloured races to New Zealand does not come up under this proposition, it is fully provided for under our legislation and we deal with that quite independently of this question. If the condition of affairs which exists now is permitted to go on connected with our shipping there are only two alternatives for the people who own and control the fine steamship companies manned by white officers, white engineers, and white crews; they must either transfer the registration of their ships to places beyond the oversea Dominions and follow the same course as other shipping companies of employing Lascars at low rates of wages to enable them to hold their trade in the southern seas where those oversea Dominions are, or they must get the Governments of the people in those countries, which in reality means the people, to alter the whole of our laws, which are of such extraordinary use to our country and of great value to the crews on board those ships, so as to relieve them from the conditions that the labour laws in the country require to be observed—the conditions of appeal to the Conciliation Arbitration Court in New Zealand which, when disputes arise, settle the wages and which must be followed by all whom it affects. The alternative to transferring the registration of these ships and giving them the right, as is the case now under the British law, of employing Lascars at low rates of pay, and then competing upon equal terms out in our seas for coastal trade or intercolonial trade between New Zealand and Australia, or trade between New Zealand and the Islands—the alternative to the transfer of these ships from being owned and registered in our country and conforming to our laws there would be to expect our countries to repeal laws which the people believe in, which are in the interest of the white crews on board those vessels, and thus force the rate of wages down to that which is paid to Lascars and Asiatics who come along in competition with the existing crews, and under existing conditions it is a most unfair competition.

Either of these propositions is unthinkable from our standpoint. First of all, why should an extraordinary and an indefensible penalty be imposed upon the enterprise of the people of a young country attached to Great Britain who, thirty or forty years ago or more, decided to have a thoroughly efficient mercantile marine owned in their own country and carrying on the work of that country both around its coasts and beyond its shores? Why should the people there, who have built up admittedly one of the finest steamship companies in the world, whose vessels are manned by white officers, white engineers, white firemen, and white crews—why, not on account of any unfriendly feeling towards the Indian Empire or the people in the Indian Empire, but because of the fact that for commercial reasons certain other steamship companies are employing Lascars at a low rate of pay—and I am not disputing the right of those companies to carry on their work as they are doing, or saying that they have not got an absolute legal right to do so—should a country like ours (I am speaking for New Zealand only at the moment although I believe Australia is in exactly the same position) be placed in this difficult position because of the action by a great and powerful British steamship company plying from England across the seas to the Australian coast and on to New Zealand with a large number of Lascars employed on them? Why should the whole of the industrial life of thousands of people employed on board our ships not only be jeopardised but menaced with the destruction of the whole system as it stands under the existing conditions? To that I for one am anxious to do all in my power to prevent. I am always ready to spread throughout our country, if the necessity should arise to do it—and I say again there is no feeling against the Indian Empire or the Indians as a portion of the British people—the doctrines suggested by Lord Crewe to