

19 June, 1911.]

BRITISH AND FOREIGN SHIPPING.

[11th Day.

Mr. BUXTON—*cont.*

instance, would not tamely submit to the imposition of such conditions on their ships. These foreign countries will say—and what would be the answer?—"You have allowed your Dominions to impose regulations in order chiefly to prevent undue competition with the local industries. We will do the same. You unduly compete in our ports to the disadvantage of our shipping. In future you must be subject to certain regulations and accommodation which will reduce your competition with us." What would be the result? The whole force and brunt of the retaliation would fall on United Kingdom shipping. The Dominions would suffer not at all or very slightly. The entrances and clearances of foreign vessels at Australian and New Zealand ports in 1908, for instance, amounted to nearly 2,500,000 tons, and of this New Zealand only accounted for about 100,000 tons. The entrances and clearances of British ships in trade between the United Kingdom and Protectionist foreign countries alone amounted in the same years to no less than 134 million tons.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Where does that apply to?

Mr. BUXTON: That is the United Kingdom trade with the Protectionist foreign countries alone—134 million tons (the total trade is very much greater than that)—whereas in the case of Australia and New Zealand the foreign clearances and entrances are 2,500,000 tons. These Tariff countries know how to retaliate, and would not hesitate to do so—Australia and New Zealand, as active Protectionist countries themselves, know this full well. The United Kingdom carries for the whole world, and this being so a large section of our carrying trade is very vulnerable to reprisals.

I have spoken of the advantages of uniformity of mercantile laws, and in our opinion, based on great and prolonged experience, such uniformity is of the essence of successful long sea trade. I showed the other day when we were discussing the Australian resolution in reference to navigation laws, that we had, especially of late, been successful in bringing about a considerable degree of International uniformity in respect of matters pertaining to the Mercantile Marine. We desire that if possible this uniformity of legislation and of jurisdiction, without conflicting or overlapping regulations, should rather be extended than curtailed.

At the subsidiary Conference on Merchant Shipping in 1907, which arrived at most useful and unanimous conclusions, to which Sir James Mills, the head of the great Union of New Zealand Shipping Company to which reference was made, was a party, and agreed to them, it was possible for representative ship-owners and others to explain their case as they view it for themselves. Owing to the rules of the Imperial Conference this is not possible to-day, and therefore I am bound to do my best, as the Minister responsible for Merchant Shipping here, to put before the Conference the very grave view sincerely held by those who conduct a great British industry, of the real peril in which they believe they would stand if the proposals foreshadowed in the New Zealand resolutions as explained were adopted by the Conference.

These arguments prevailed in 1907. Surely we ought not to depart fundamentally from that policy without full and extended inquiry after very careful consideration by representatives of the different parts of the Empire, and of all the interests concerned.

As regards the resolution itself, I am afraid, for the reasons I have given, His Majesty's Government are unable to adopt it as it stands. I have endeavoured to see how far it might be amended so as to meet the various views. But I do not see that it would be possible to amend it as it stands, and I venture to hope that under those circumstances Sir Joseph Ward, having raised the very interesting discussion he has had, and having been able to state his views, may be inclined not to press it, but if he does I am afraid we cannot give it our support. Especially, I may venture to make that appeal to him in view of the fact that this question of the Empire's shipping was one of the points to which reference was made in Sir Wilfrid Laurier's motion for the appointment of a Royal Commission, and therefore it is one of the points which will be discussed by them and in connection with which they will have an opportunity of considering the Dominion point of view as well as the Imperial point of view and the view of those interested in the matter. What I venture to put to the Conference is this: that under present circumstances it is not possible for us to adopt such a wide resolution, that we are anxious as far as we can to maintain uniformity of legislation in this matter of the Mercantile Marine, and I have