

2 June, 1911.] COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND BRITISH SHIPPING.

[4th Day.]

Sir WILFRID LAURIER—*cont.*

view to exempting the effect of the treaties so far as the Dominion is concerned if the Dominion concerned were to ask for such an exemption. It would be done to-day if the treaty were to be negotiated, but as they are in effect, is it not possible to enter into negotiations by the British Government whereby they will not denounce the treaty but obtain from the contracting party the privilege for any of the Dominion Governments to be exempted from the operation of that treaty—for instance, in this case, Australia?

I do not know, as I said a moment ago, to what nations these treaties may apply, but suppose it is a treaty with Italy or with France, would it not be possible to obtain from the French Government or the Italian Government that they would agree to allow any of the Dominions to withdraw from the operation of such treaty? This would not go to the extent of debarring the United Kingdom of the advantages which they might derive from the treaty, but it would have the advantage of getting the Dominions withdrawn from its operations. It is likely enough that those treaties are of such advantage to the United Kingdom and to the other nation respectively that it would not be an interference with the rights or benefits derived by each of the other nations, and probably a matter of very little consequence.

Therefore I think the motion is one which is worthy of very careful consideration, and I had intended at some time or another to submit a resolution in this form to the Conference, which perhaps I might read now so as to bring it to the attention of the Conference: "That His Majesty's Government be requested to open negotiations with the several Foreign Governments having treaties which apply to the oversea Dominions, with a view to securing liberty for any of these Dominions which may so desire to withdraw from the operation of the treaty without impairing the treaty as respects the rest of the Empire." I would not propose to move it to-day, but I place it to-day before the Conference so that it may be thought over.

If this resolution were passed it would have this effect of asking the Government of the United Kingdom to enter into negotiations with those respective nations with a view to securing to the Dominions the liberty of withdrawing from the operation of such treaties. If such a motion as this were accepted and if such a thing were to be carried out I do not know how far it would be acceptable to the Government of the United Kingdom, but if such a treaty could be negotiated it would have the effect of securing Australia against the obstacles which are now in its way and without impairing the advantages which the United Kingdom derives from such a treaty.

Mr. FISHER: Would you like to move that?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Not to-day; I think I would like to give notice of it for consideration.

Mr. FISHER: It is better to get on with the business, is it not?

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I agree with the resolution moved by Mr. Fisher. I think it is advisable in the interests, both of the United Kingdom and of the British Dominions beyond the seas that efforts in favour of British manufactured goods and British shipping should be supported as far as is practicable. Now I recognise that in the business conducted with the oversea Dominions there are at least two countries which are paying enormous subsidies to steamers that are competing very strongly against the British manufacturer and against the British shipowner in the trade of the oversea Dominions, and I do not believe myself that it is possible under the existing conditions for those who are conducting the export trade from the United Kingdom in many cases to compete upon equal terms with those countries.

As a matter of fact, it is perfectly well known to many people who look into the question of the development of trade that in some instances it is cheaper to ship goods at an English port and to allow them to go on to a German port and bring them back again round the ordinary ports and thence out to Australia