

Enclosure.

PRESS CABLEGRAMS (BRITISH EMPIRE)

Reduced Rates.

MR. CROFT asked the Postmaster-General whether he can yet give any information with regard to the improvement in cable communication between the Mother-country and the Dominions.

Sir GEORGE TOULMIN asked the Postmaster-General whether, in view of the resolutions passed at the Imperial Conference in favour of an improvement in cable communication between this country and the self-governing dominions, he is in a position to announce the result of any steps he has been able to take to give effect to those resolutions.

Mr. HERBERT SAMUEL.—A strong desire was expressed by the dominion representatives at the Imperial Conference for the cheaper transmission of Press cablegrams between the various portions of the Empire. With this desire His Majesty's Government are in cordial sympathy, regarding the easy communication of information of common interest as of prime importance in strengthening the cohesion of the Empire. I have been in correspondence with the Western Union Telegraph Company of the United States in connection with the leasing by that company of the cables of the Anglo-American Telegraph Company and of the Direct United States Company. The cables of the Atlantic companies are fully employed during a few hours of the day, but less fully during the remaining hours. I am glad to be able to announce that, in view of this fact, the three companies referred to have consented to accept Press messages which are not of an urgent character, and which may be postponed to the more urgent traffic, at one-half of the present rates. For the present the deferment may be less, but will not be more than nineteen hours reckoned from the clock-time of acceptance in the country of origin to the clock-time of delivery in the country of destination, except that, if the cables are congested, some further delay may be unavoidable. I have also obtained the consent of the Pacific Cable Board and of the Australian Government to a similar reduction in their charges for Press messages of this class. The tariff of the New Zealand Government was already very low, and a further diminution was not asked. The effect will be that the rates for these deferred Press telegrams between the United Kingdom on the one hand, and Canada, as well as the United States, on the other, will be 2½d. a word, instead of 5d. as now; and between the United Kingdom and Australia and New Zealand the rate will be 4½d. a word instead of 9d. I am in communication with the Commercial Cable Company also on this question. I regret that I have not yet been able to arrange for a similar reduction in cablegrams to and from India and South Africa, but the Eastern Telegraph Company has consented to carry the Australasian cablegrams at the reduced rate in the event of interruption to the Pacific cable. The service will come into full operation on the 15th instant, but the Western Union, Anglo-American, and Direct United States Companies will be prepared to accept the Press telegrams at the reduced rates at their own offices on and from to-morrow. The Western Union Company proposes also, of its own initiative, to establish at once for the use of the public a system of so-called "night letters" and "week-end letters" between this country and places in Canada and the United States. These will be plain-language cablegrams carried at largely reduced rates. "Night letters" will be delivered on the morning of the second day after they are handed in. The charge per word will be rather more than quarter the usual rate, with a minimum of 6s. for twenty words or less. The "week-end letters" will be accepted on or before Saturdays for delivery on the following Tuesdays. The charge per word will be about one-fifth of the present rate, with a minimum of 6s. for thirty words or less. On and from the 15th instant the Post Office will receive these messages and co-operate in forwarding them by post or telegraph, according to rules which will be announced. For the present Press telegrams at the reduced rates and the new letter telegrams will be sent by the cables of the Western Union Telegraph Company and the two allied companies which I have already mentioned, and, so far as North America is concerned, can only be sent to places on the Western Union Company's system. I am glad to say also that the negotiations which have been proceeding for some time with the cable companies for reducing by one-half the rates for plain-language non-urgent cablegrams between the United Kingdom, India, the dominions, the Crown colonies, and the United States have proved successful; and the new arrangements will take effect on the 1st of January next. I anticipate that the concurrence of certain foreign administrations will soon be obtained, and that the scheme will shortly be extended to many other parts of the world. Under the new regulations of the Telegraph Convention the use of codes has been largely extended, and code telegrams can be sent cheaply. I hope that the new tariffs will be of service to the senders of Press and private messages in plain language, which are not of an urgent character, with respect to which the existing rates press heavily. No appreciable cost will fall upon the Treasury through these charges.

Cheap Inland Night Telegrams.

I would add that I propose also to introduce experimentally the system of cheap night telegrams into this country, so as to make fuller use of the telegraph system during hours when it is now idle. The public are likely to use such a facility only to distant places, as the post will naturally be preferred where it is equally serviceable. At the outset the system will be tried between London and Aberdeen and between London and Belfast. The charge will be 6d. for thirty-six words and ½d. for every three words thereafter. The telegrams will be accepted up to midnight at the head offices, and will be delivered with the first morning delivery of letters. If the system is found to be of use to the public it will be extended to other places.

Mr. HARRY LAWSON.—During which hours will Press telegrams at reduced rates be accepted?

Mr. HERBERT SAMUEL.—Press telegrams at reduced rates for transmission to the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand will be accepted at any hours.