

Mr. MEIGHEN: Why was the matter not taken up at the Economic conference?

Mr. DUFF: I really do not know. Further, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand could not possibly be expected to understand Canadian conditions so as to arrive at any conclusion that would be satisfactory to this country. The history of the Imperial conference and Imperial Colonial conference is that years elapsed before any reasonable conclusions were arrived at. The Colonial conference of 1911 suggesting the appointment of an Imperial Dominions Royal Commission reported in 1917, or six years after they first met. The conclusions of this conference of 1911 which reported in 1917 have not been acted upon prior to this date. Does that answer my right hon. friend's question why the Imperial Economic conference cannot deal with this matter? The English people are great people, but they are pretty slow in some matters, and we Canadians, who are swift, do not want to wait until the British government reports on this matter. With these facts staring one in the face, the futility of suggesting that the present question should be referred to another commission of this character is obvious, and the suggestion too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment. I therefore think that parliament should unhesitatingly reject the amendment that has been submitted by the hon. member for Burrard (Mr. Clark). Rather, let those hon. gentlemen who may be appointed to act on the proposed committee get together and consider all the facts from every possible angle; let them take all the evidence which they deem necessary, either from government officials or from representatives of the steamship companies, so that they may be able to come to a sound and a fair conclusion. We want to give everyone a square deal, and if the committee should find that rates cannot equitably be reduced on any commodity, whether it be wheat or cattle or anything else, then let them report to parliament accordingly. I do say, however, that it is time the air was cleared. In the interests not only of the companies concerned but of the common people of the country as well it is highly essential that there should be a show down, and I trust that the committee after proper investigation will report to parliament something which will be satisfactory to the people of Canada at large, whether they be shippers, producers, or the plain folk in the ordinary walks of life.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

After Recess

The House resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. L. J. LADNER (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, at six o'clock the hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff) who is a practical man in the shipping business, had concluded his well-reasoned address, in which he told us that the objections to the Petersen contract came from the friends of the official opposition. But it is significant that these objections come from the rank and file of the people, demonstrating their endorsement of the attitude of the official opposition towards the proposal of the government. For instance, I have before me a communication from the Vancouver Board of Trade, one of the largest organizations of commercial and business men on the Pacific coast, containing some 2,000 members and representative of all the business interests of Vancouver—yes, and of inland districts of the province. This is in the form of a letter to the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King, and after pointing out that the council of the board had met, it proceeds:

Having had an opportunity of perusing the report of Mr. W. T. R. Preston regarding the North Atlantic Steamship Combine, and having studied the proposed agreement contained in the Routine Proceedings and Orders of the Day for Monday, February 23, the council unanimously resolve, that this board again express to you the strongest opposition to the granting of this subsidy on the ground that it is not in the public interest and will not be effective in reducing freight rates.

There is the opinion of a body of business men who know what will conduce to the best interests of the country generally. In today's papers I notice that the Montreal Board of Trade and the Montreal Corn Exchange have taken a similar stand. I also have a telegram from a body of men who probably are better acquainted with the shipping business than even the members of the Vancouver Board of Trade; I refer to the Vancouver Merchants' Exchange. They have addressed a telegram to Hon. T. A. Low, Minister of Trade and Commerce, which reads as follows:

The Vancouver Merchants' Exchange, representative of the shipping and exporting interests of this port, is of opinion that there exists no need for the reported subsidy to shipping or any interference with the operation of the regular economic laws in this regard, but that if it be deemed advisable by reason of conditions of which we are unaware to take such action, opportunity should be first given a full examination and discussion of the matter as affecting the entire export trade of Canada. It is further requested that no action be taken by the government until such opportunity has been afforded.