

*Ocean Shipping Rates*

The hon. member for Burrard (Mr. Clark) has moved the following amendment:

That Mr. Speaker do not now leave the chair but that it be resolved: That effective control of ocean rates can be exercised only with the co-operation of all portions of the empire, and by a body on which all are represented, and the contract made by the government with Sir William Petersen, based on the report of W. T. R. Preston is ill-advised, costly and futile and unworthy of the serious consideration of this House.

The hon. member, on a very grave and serious question of this House, was certainly ill-advised in introducing such an amendment, when the principal thing he said in his amendment was that this contract was based on a report by W. T. R. Preston, and was ill-advised, costly and futile and unworthy of the serious consideration of this House. That, to my mind, should make every member of this House vote against that amendment. The fact remains that this resolution is not based on Mr. Preston's report at all. This agreement was entered into on the 11th day of December, 1924, whereas Mr. Preston's report was mailed in London, England, only on December 31, 1924. How could the government make an agreement with Sir William Petersen based on the Preston report, as the hon. member states in his amendment, if Mr. Preston's report left London twenty days after the agreement was entered into?

Mr. LEWIS: Does that not nullify the report altogether, if the agreement was made before the report was received?

Mr. DUFF: The agreement is not based on the report. The report is a sort of annex to what the government already knew. It only confirms the fact that there are excessive freight rates, because as I said first in my speech, and as I repeat now for the seventeenth time, the agreement is not based on the Preston report. Prominent manufacturers have written reams of letters to the department complaining about these freight rates, and I presume the action of the government was based on this accumulation of evidence which came in from all parts of the country, and not on Mr. Preston's report.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I read in the preamble:

And whereas the government of Canada after an investigation of the representations brought to its knowledge and after giving the same serious consideration has thought it wise—

And so on. What does that investigation refer to?

Mr. DUFF: I am sorry I cannot use sufficient language to make either the right hon. gentleman or some other hon. members understand

[Mr. Duff.]

what I mean. Let me see if I can put it in other language. What I said was that this legislation was not based on the Preston report: that year after year complaints had been coming into the Liberal government of 1911, the Conservative government of 1911 to 1917, and my right hon. friend, when he was Prime Minister, that these freight rates were too high and that there was discrimination in certain respects. Therefore, the government had sufficient evidence to warrant them in making this agreement with Sir William Petersen or anybody else without waiting for the Preston report, whereas the hon. member for Burrard claims that the agreement is based on that report. I do not think this parliament should accept the amendment of the hon. member for Burrard, first, because there is no necessity to drag Mr. Preston into the matter at all. If the hon. member cannot give a better reason why this House should vote for his amendment and vote against the resolution, then he would have been far better advised if he had not moved it. He also states in his amendment:

That effective control of ocean rates can be exercised only with the co-operation of all portions of the empire and by a body on which all are represented.

That means that the hon. member for Burrard wishes us not to deal with the situation now, not to try to find a remedy in 1925, or 1926, or even 1927, because the experience of previous governments who appointed Sir George Foster and Sir Henry Drayton to look into this matter and who appointed Sir George Foster as a member of the Imperial commission, has been that it took five years for them to make a report. How could my hon. friend expect, if his amendment is adopted and an Imperial conference is called, that anything is going to be done for the Canadian people in the next two or three or, perhaps, five years? This is a matter for Canada; it is a matter for the Canadian parliament to deal with, and there is no reason why we should not make the first step in this direction, why we should not ourselves go ahead and fix these rates without consulting any other part of the empire. There is no reasonable probability of such a conference being arranged to meet in London or elsewhere within one or two years. There is no reasonable probability, should such a conference ever be held, of members of the conference arriving at any satisfactory conclusion respecting Canadian interests. We must not forget that a great deal of the capital invested in these steamship companies is British capital and that an Imperial conference is certainly not going to give to Canada anything other than it is compelled to.