

BUNKERING WAR NOT FEASIBLE.**State Interference Feared in Britain.**

Fear of State interference is the note that runs through a recent article in "Fairplay," London, on Foreign Bunkering After the War. The question of the admission of German shipping to British or Allied coaling stations is discussed and the writer is against exclusive treatment. In part the article reads:

The demand put forward by a certain section of our press that Germany's shipowners should be penalized and that an attempt should, in fact, be made to drive her mercantile marine off the seas by the seemingly simple expedient of refusing it permission to coal at British bunkering stations throughout the world may be excellent armchair strategy, but it carries a destructive germ with it in that it would necessarily imply some sort of State control.

I would mention three causes which militate against abnormal action. The first is—and there should be no need to look beyond it—that if the Allies insist upon enforcing the ton for ton policy against Germany she will have no ships of her own to deal with. Secondly, however much our world supremacy may rest on our coal mines, it would be too gross to assume that our coal merchants could be excluded from trading with Germany while everyone else was allowed a free market. Thirdly, though personal inclinations cannot be fettered, the peace terms must, as far as they can, fix the penalty which Germany has to pay for her abominations, and must leave as few raw, frictional surfaces as possible. Those who today are advocating bunker restrictions seem to me to be moved more by spite than statesmanship.

Socially and commercially, the Germans individually for years to come will be ostracised. But, apart from our power to constitute them, under the peace terms, controlled producers and consumers until the cash part of their punishment has been paid in full, we should be merely stultifying ourselves if we endeavored to make them outlaws throughout the world—we lack the police force. For our own sakes they will have to be allowed to trade, nothing can prevent neutral nations from trading with them, and, so far as coaling is concerned, it has to be remembered that, while British bunkering depots are to be found practically all over the world, foreign firms also have similar large depots, and that the direct effect of any, what I would call, sentimental action on our part would be to free German vessels—assuming that they for a time are allowed any freedom—either to make their own bunkering arrangements, by carrying sufficient German coal for the out and home voyage, or by starting their own bunkering depots under, it might be, a foreign flag, or to force them into the arms of our competitors.

Even assuming that the Allies could agree among themselves to the exclusion suggested, restriction bristles with difficulties, and with the germs of hidden trouble. For instance, supposing a Swedish vessel were suspected of being chartered by Germans how would that suspicion be verified, and would she be denied coaling facilities until she had produced a clean bill of health?

OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENT.

This subject of British coaling stations was considered by the committee appointed by the Chamber of Shipping of the United Kingdom and the Liverpool Steamship Owners' Association to deal with trade after the war, and in their report they express the opinion that

"54. Under war conditions, the State has exercised through the coaling stations a control over vessels under foreign flags, and it has been suggested that this control should be continued and used so as to confer advantages on vessels under the British and Allied flags. In our opinion, if this suggestion is acted on it must inevitably lead to the establishment of other coaling stations on foreign territory, and the coal stored in such stations could be used to our detriment in the event of another war far more easily than coal which was stored in British coaling stations, and therefore under British control. We may have the more convenient coaling stations, but it is a mistake to suppose that other stations could not be established in foreign territory to serve the needs of foreign vessels in all parts of the world.

"55. In our opinion, our aim should be to encourage and develop coaling and oil stations throughout the Empire, so that the supplies may so far as is possible be under British control."

On the first of the above findings the opinion of bunkering firms is to all intents unanimous—they agree with the committee. As regards the second, assuming that the encouragement and development suggested implies Government interference, it is held that official intervention in the past has not had

such results as would induce any business man to go out of his way to seek it. It national interests clearly demand the interposition of the State in this vital matter, it would have to be accepted, of course. But the past history of the action of the principal British bunkering firms indicates that they, by their enterprise and honesty, established themselves in active competition with bunkering businesses all over the world and shipowners universally have been accustomed to fix all their contracts with these firms, who, where they themselves do not own a depot, acted as agents for those who did, and who are quite convinced that if left alone, they will be able to provide all concerned, on satisfactory terms, with what coaling facilities they may require, and without any Government departmental "encouragement."

ALTERNATIVE POLICIES.

The matter is one involving international as well as national issues. If the terms of peace are such that the enemy's commercial recovery rests with the Allies who are all ad idem on a mercantile policy, then there should be no valid reason why normal competitive conditions in respect of the establishment and carrying on of our coaling stations should not obtain after the war. If hostilities ended in a draw even to the extent that German trading would have unfettered markets, or if in the peace terms such matters as British coaling stations were not included, State aid might have to be invoked, and that would mean at all events a measure of State interference. The matter that has to be kept right to the front is the need for the bunkering firms to see to it that they are not penalized merely owing to their being a certain number of windy pseudo-imperialists in this country who, because a problem is big, and because its operations extend beyond the four walls of the kingdom, seem to imagine that it can only be dealt with by the united brains of the nation.

U.S. RAILROADS HANDLING ENORMOUS TRAFFIC.

"Approximately complete statistics of freight movement during the first six months after the United States entered the war, April to September inclusive, compiled by the Bureau of Railway Economics for Railroads' War Board, disclose that in that period the railways not only handled far more traffic than in any earlier six months, but also as much as in any entire year prior to 1907," says the Railway Age Gazette. "The years 1906 and 1907 marked the climax of a long period of rapid increase of railroad business, which resulted in the longest and most acute congestion of traffic and 'shortage' of cars ever known until recent months. It is therefore not without significance that in the first six months of 1917 after the country entered the war, the railways handled as much freight as in the entire year 1906.

"In 1915 the railways handled only 30 per cent more freight than in 1906, while in 1917 they are handling approximately 100 per cent more than in 1906. These facts illustrate not only the enormous increase in freight business during past eleven years, but also how swiftly the bulk of the increase has come within the last two years."

SHIPPING NEWS ITEMS.

England is estimated to have 2,300,000 warship tonnage, against 1,000,000 at the outside for Germany. British mercantile tonnage is 18,500,000, against about 3,500,000 for Germany.

Japanese shipyards launched nine ships, aggregating 45,115 tons, in September, establishing a record. Japan's program provides for launching of 300,000 tons in the fiscal year ending next April, and 35 vessels, aggregating 154,727 tons, have so far been launched.

Agreement has been reached between Holland and America whereby 88 Dutch ships of 350,000 tons will be turned over to United States Shipping Board. Dutch ships now in North River, New York, will proceed to Holland with grain immediately.

German firm of Hugo Stinnes, of Mannheim, has acquired control of the shipyards now building at Landskrona, which will be the largest in Sweden, and Swedish papers are demanding that government take steps to stop foreign influence on Swedish industry.

The American Exporter says that shipbuilding in the United States in 1917 will be 400 per cent greater than in 1914, and one yard alone which has contracts for 120 vessels expects by spring to be launching two every week. There are 50 shipyards in the North-west alone, those in Seattle launching no less than 110,700 tons in December. Meanwhile other countries are also building ships.

SUBMARINE INEFFECTIVE.

The New York Times points out that the submarine has not prevented a considerable increase in British imports, which in November reached a new high record with £109,759,023 against £88,934,806 in 1916 and £94,260,963 in October of this year. Exports also from Great Britain have not been reduced. November's total was £43,382,335 against £42,488,252 in 1916. Our exports to the Allies in October were £414,877,309 against £368,111,000 last year, and the total for 10 months shows an increase of \$521,000,000. It is noticeable that exports from Great Britain rose from \$131,282,000 in September to \$182,777,000 in October, despite the growing scarcity of cargo space.

WHO AM I?

I am more talked of than anything else in America!
I am the autocrat of the commercial interests!
I control the treasures of the world!
I command the bank clearances!
I am as powerful as Ajax!
I can stop commerce!
I am supreme!
Rulers and the common people alike
Take off their hats to me.
My aristocratic cousins, the luxurious Pullman car,
And the steel coach who in the past snubbed
Me, now crave my favors!
I am merciful!
I can help you, but
I lack energy!
You must supply that!
Left to my own efforts
I am inert and innocuous!
Energize me and you increase your bank account!
Stimulate me and the wheels of commerce revolve!

WHO AM I?

I am the freight car!
I market your crops!
Load me promptly!
Unload me quickly!
Move me swiftly, and
You will prosper!—St. Louis Furniture News.

THE WOODEN SHIP FAILURE.

Admiral Bowles of the Emergency Fleet Corporation in his testimony before U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, gave convincing reasons for his belief that the plan for building wooden merchant vessels in any great number was a failure. These are mostly reasons that should have been foreseen and probably would have been if the Shipping Board, when it set out on this plan, had not been dominated by the lumber interests of the northern Pacific Coast. But there never was at any time ground for believing that any large number of wooden ships were desirable for the overseas part of the merchant trade in war time. The only argument of any force was that they might be more quickly built and put into active service on a large scale. This plea proved to be a delusion and a snare.

One of the chief reasons for the failure of the wooden ship programme was the failure of the Southern pine lumber men to furnish more than a fraction of the timber contracted for in the time agreed upon.

Admiral Bowles declared that the fabrication of steel ships on standardized plans was "the great, inspired thing of our whole programme," and said that 90 per cent of the effort now being expended on wooden ships could be better used on steel vessels. He thinks it may be necessary or desirable to commandeer some of the private shipping plants. The output for the next year, he believes, would be 7,100,000 tons if the Emergency Fleet Corporation got all the steel it required and if all non-essentials were cut off. One shipbuilding company has contracted for 128 ships of 7,500 to 8,000 tons each, at a total cost of \$165,000,000. This is given as an example. Of 431 requisitioned vessels 49 have been completed, and new ships are being launched at frequent intervals. On the whole the prospect seems to be hopeful now that all friction in the Shipping Board and the Emergency Fleet Corporation has been removed.—New York Journal of Commerce.

WITH HAMLET LEFT OUT.

(New York Herald.)

Not a bad idea of the Kaiser that all the sovereigns of Europe meet in peace conference, "as was done after the Napoleonic wars." But he seems to have forgotten that Napoleon was not there.