

Whichever shall be the lower rate.

So that under subsection (b) of the agreement what the British preference may be, what it is now, what it was at the date of the agreement, what it is going to be next year, what it is likely to be at any time during the currency of this agreement, is at the very basis of this whole proposition. When my hon. friend from St. John was discussing this matter, the Minister of Trade and Commerce endeavoured to escape responsibility by jocularity.

Mr. PUGSLEY: Which was very unfair.

Mr. MACDONALD: When I find two old associates like these gentlemen exchanging compliments across the floor, it must be understood that those of us who are not within the sacred circle are not to be affected in the slightest degree by these pleasantries. Here is a business proposition the basis of which is what this preferential tariff is now, and is going to be, and when we ask the Minister of Trade and Commerce for information, he simply says he cannot tell us, or that he will not tell us. I might remind the hon. gentleman that when he sat in Opposition, he never allowed the Government to put any kind of proposition through this House without knowing what the full meaning and effect of it was. He tells us there is to be no lowering of the British preference, and apparently there is to be no discussion of the tariff permitted in this House until a tariff commission has been appointed and has reported. It will be a great disappointment to many people in this country if tariff legislation is to be postponed until that late period. The Prime Minister has evidently committed to the hon. member the task of dealing with the question of preferential trade, and the hon. gentleman has no doubt in his mind a well thought out line of action for not only the West Indies but for other colonies and for the Mother Country as well. Why should he not frankly tell us what that policy is now that he is initiating it in this treaty? We should be told now whether the Government purposes not merely to lower the British preference, but whether, so long as they are permitted to remain in office, and this agreement continues, they intend to maintain the British preference as it is. Those of us who were here last Parliament remember how the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Henderson) was accustomed to declare that the British preference was not in the interest of a large portion of the people of Canada. Where does that hon. gentleman stand now upon this question of preference? Where does the Minister of Finance stand upon it? Is it to be the permanent policy of this country, while the agreement remains in force, or is it to

be diminished or increased? I can hardly believe that my hon. friend, when negotiating with these West Indian gentlemen, never ran up against this question or that these men, who based their whole tariff, as well as this agreement, on what that British preference was to be, never obtained some assurance from this Government as to what its policy was. If any assurance was given, my hon. friend should give it to this House and to the country.

Mr. FOSTER: I do not wish to be discourteous to my hon. friend; so I will have to take a little of the time of the House to explain it to him, in order that he may see clearly what has been explained already two or three times. My hon. friend has made some assertions which go far beyond any assertions which I made; he has added something to my assertions in the way that irresponsible commentators do. I do not recollect making a hard and fast statement that there was to be no interference with British preference; what I meant to say and what I believe I did say, was that there was no present intention of lowering British preference. I did not say, until a commission had been appointed, made its investigation and its report, and the Government had considered it, that there would be no rearrangement of the tariff. I do not remember having used the words 'Tariff Commission' at all.

Mr. MACDONALD: You certainly did.

Mr. FOSTER: What I stated was this, as has been stated in this House before on several occasions in connection with this Bill, that there are some tariff adjustments that have to be made, therefore we will have a tariff Bill before this House in order to make those adjustments, and until the Act which deals generally with the tariff and not with this special agreement is brought down, my contention was, and I think it is perfectly fair, and I intend to stand by it, that the questions at present put before me are not germane.

Mr. MACDONALD: Does my hon. friend mean that when the tariff Bill for this session comes down, it will provide further changes than are contemplated in this Act, and that then the statement can be made which he cannot give us now?

Mr. FOSTER: I think my hon. friend understands thoroughly what I stated to my hon. friend from St. John (Mr. Pugsley), that at that time it would be proper for the questions to be put and answered.

Mr. MACDONALD: Why can you not do it now?

Mr. FOSTER: My hon. friend is also a little at fault in another assertion he makes regarding dependence on British preference. I do not think he is right in that