

ernment was not to lower the British preference. But the hon. gentleman displayed an unusual amount of caution after dinner. I do not know what could have occurred in the meantime. There is no necessity for him to adopt such unusual reticence. His frankness has usually been one of his qualifications and why he should become so exceedingly reticent when he is submitting to the House for approval the first of what he would like to be a succession of arrangements with the different colonies of the Empire is something I cannot understand. If he wants to carry out a trade policy by which Canada will make arrangements, not merely with the West Indies but with Australia, where, I understand, he is going very shortly, why should he draw himself within his shell and say: I am not going to say anything at all, I am not touching this British preference and I do not dare to mention a word about it, although his whole arrangement is based on this British preference idea. It is impossible to understand the reticence which he is now displaying.

Mr. PUGSLEY: He is afraid that it will be cabled to Bonar Law.

Mr. MACDONALD: I do not see why the hon. gentleman (Mr. Foster) should not tell this House whether he and Bonar Law had a discussion over this question.

Mr. FOSTER: Over the West Indian question?

Mr. MACDONALD: My hon. friend certainly discussed the West Indian question with Bonar Law; there is no doubt about that.

Mr. FOSTER: There is no doubt about that?

Mr. MACDONALD: I assume that the hon. gentleman assents to that?

Mr. FOSTER: My hon. friend says that there is no doubt about that.

Mr. MACDONALD: Does my hon. friend assent to that?

Mr. FOSTER: I am making no assent.

Mr. MACDONALD: My hon. friend is getting to be so superlatively cautious that I do not know why he should expect to secure any legislation from this House. We all remember the vociferous demands that the hon. gentleman used to make on previous occasions for information that was required before any proposition involving the fiscal relations of this country should be considered by the House. But my hon. friend has so changed that he has become but a strange semblance of his former self.

Mr. MACDONALD

When the responsibility of government is put upon him he absolutely declines to even discuss the very basis of the proposition that he is submitting to the House. My hon. friend cannot get away from this question by any theory of state secrets. The hon. minister asks us to embody this trade agreement with the West Indies in an Act of Parliament, and the rates of duty specified in the Bill which he submits are dependent upon what the British preference is to-day and what it is going to be during the continuance of this arrangement, and when we ask him what he and his colleagues have to say about it, he tells us that it is some horrid state secret about which nothing can be said. We have the assurance of the hon. gentleman that there is to be no lowering of the British preference by this Government; and being so cautious about everything else, I am surprised that he should have been so incautious as to make such an admission. He tells us he can say nothing about the tariff policy of the Government until it is brought down to this House after a tariff commission has been appointed and has reported. Are we to understand that there is to be nothing done about the tariff or about the British preference until a tariff commission has enquired into and dealt with the matter, and that in view of the fact that there is no attempt by the Government so far to ask Parliament to institute such a commission. Then, the hon. gentleman declines to tell us whether he consulted with prominent men in England, as to this scheme of preferential trade that he has inaugurated with the West Indies, and that he proposes to establish with Australia and I presume with New Zealand. This agreement with the West Indies in effect, leaving out all unnecessary verbiage, says:

3. There shall be levied, collected and paid, after the said agreement is in accordance with its terms brought into operation and so long as it remains in force, on all goods enumerated in schedule B.

(a) At the rate of four-fifths of the several rates of duty, if any, imposed on similar goods when imported from any foreign country.

If it were left at that, there would not be so much difficulty; but there is this alternative proposition which has to be carefully considered before anyone can conclude what the agreement really is:

(b) or, at the several rates of duty, if any, set opposite to each tariff item respectively in the column 'British Preferential Tariff' in schedule A to the Customs Tariff, 1907, and in any amendment thereof.

In order to ascertain what the proposition is, you have to consider both these sub-clauses, and in addition to that there is the third proposition.