

*Ocean Shipping Rates*

take. We were careful to tell Sir William Petersen that we knew very well that there would be gentlemen in this House who would object to any contract being formed; that the government was prepared to enter into a contract on certain conditions, but one condition was that the contract must be subject to the approval of parliament. If parliament does not approve the contract, it will not be entered into. But as regards the government being committed to a policy of desiring to control ocean rates, that is a policy to which we are committed and we think it ought to be adhered to by this House.

Mr. RYCKMAN: Does the government approve the contract?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: The government would never have signed it if it had not approved it. We believe, when this matter is referred to the committee, that the committee will approve it also.

Mr. MEIGHEN: But if not, the government will change it to suit the committee.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: If not, the government will do the best it can to try to bring in a measure in accordance with the general will of the House. In that respect we differ from my right hon. friend.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: The situation is considerably clarified now in this second statement—and I am sure it is a statement welcomed by many members of this House—that the policy by which the government stands or falls is not a policy of subsidizing this or any other line, but a policy of controlling by the best possible method the cost of ocean transportation; that the committee will be empowered to make suggestions and if the committee reports and suggests what, in its opinion, is a better method of controlling ocean rates, the government may then adopt the suggestion of the committee in preference to the resolution before the House, without in any way imperilling its own position.

Mr. MEIGHEN: It will not do that.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I think the members of this House will agree that that is about as fair a statement as can be made under the circumstances. That has largely met the point which I first suggested as to testing the good faith of this government.

Having reached that point and having elicited that statement, I think I can very well come to a conclusion. I wish to conclude simply by making this statement, and I am speaking rather generally now, because after all, this is a subject with which we can deal only generally at the present time. The gen-

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

eral statement is this: I and other members have been asked to suggest an alternative. It has been pointed out that we have criticized and criticized severely, perhaps, in the opinion of hon. members opposite, unjustly, the provisions of this agreement and the principle of this contract. If we were in a position now to offer a satisfactory alternative, we would not be supporting the demand that this should be sent to a committee. We realize that whatever information the government may have upon those points which I mentioned and other important points, this House does not possess that information, and any alternative presented unintelligently, without due consideration of all the business facts involved in an exceedingly difficult and complex situation, would be an alternative without value. For one, I am not prepared to offer an alternative unless I have studied the question and understand what that alternative will imply in all its bearings. May I say further—and perhaps in saying this, I am repeating to a slight extent what I said before—the public generally, I think, believe that this is a question which must be considered and solved, but it must be solved in such a manner that the solution itself will not bring about greater difficulties than now exist. We have had examples—and I am making no particular reference—of legislation introduced to solve some problem, which legislation has resulted in the enhancement of that problem or the creating of other and greater problems. We must avoid that, and we can avoid that only by having ample access to all the facts that are necessary in order to reach a successful solution. The government might have adopted the attitude that they were in possession of all those facts and that, on the authority of those facts and on their own responsibility, they have introduced this measure. I am glad to see that they did not take that attitude. But this House in ratifying any agreement, in supporting any solution, must incur a measure of responsibility itself. Every one of us, whether we support or oppose any suggestion, must take our own individual responsibility for that action. We must realize what may be the result of that action.

In that connection, may I make just one reference to the amendment which has been introduced? I speak of it with diffidence as it has been introduced so lately into this House that I have not had time to consider it fully, and so I make no definite pronouncement of opinion in that regard. The weakness I see in it at a casual glance is this: The suggestion as to joint action between the various dominions and the Mother Country