

bitantly high telegraph tariff levied on messages to India and the colonies and to all our different possessions and dependencies by the Eastern and Eastern Extension and the Indo-European Telegraph Companies. They had also with them three prominent representatives of the Chambers of Commerce of Manchester, Liverpool and London who could practically voice the complaints of almost every Chamber of Commerce in the United Kingdom and the colonies with regard to a matter which so closely affected the business interests of almost every commercial and industrial venture in the country. They had a powerful auxiliary in the Indian Government, who had been sensible, for many years past, of the heavy burden imposed on Anglo-Indian trade by reason of the high charges for telegraphing. The Indian delegates to the International Telegraph Conference at Budapest, towards the end of 1896, reported "that it was a matter of great regret to the Government that some reduction was not secured on the rate in telegrams between India and Europe; but it is hoped that the thorough discussion on the subject that has taken place will pave the way to reductions being obtained at no distant date." Close upon three years had passed since that expression of opinion was made, but yet no revision and no attempt at any revision of their rates had been made by the company. It seemed to the deputation that the time had arrived for some strenuous endeavour to be made with a view to see whether some relief from the extravagantly onerous charges might be secured.

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He is also reported as saying that, if Sir M. Hicks-Beach considered that the business of the session would not permit of a Commission being granted, they humbly prayed for a Select Committee to inquire into this question, and into alternative routes; so that they might have some kind of hope to go upon that matters would be arranged more satisfactorily. Our Empire was spreading, and public opinion was keenly alive to the necessity of facilitating the operations of our trade and manufactures if they were to keep up their position in face of the great rivalry raised against them by foreign Powers.

Sir C. Dilke, referring to the strategic argument, said the experience of the recent war had confirmed what all military and naval inquirers on the question had made up their minds to—viz., that all telegraphic communication was likely to be destroyed in time of war. They must all admit that there was a case for inquiry with a view to redress from the difficulties which arose from the gaps in the various systems and the high rates. He thought the Chancellor of the Exchequer would agree that there was a grievance, and that a great political advantage would result from the remedying of such a commercial grievance as had been brought to his notice.

Mr. Provand said all business with the East was now done by telegraph—(hear, hear)—and cheap

telegraphy for the business of this country was as necessary as cheap postage and carriage.

The "Financial News" reports the Chancellor of the Exchequer as saying in part: I understood, I think, at first, that the main object you had in view was really to ventilate the question rather than to elicit any particular reply from me. Of course, the matter in all its bearings goes far beyond my special department, and I have not the knowledge nor the right at all to express the views generally of the Government in the matter. But I may say this, that while I quite agree with your general proposition that the rates between England and India at the present moment are very unduly high, I am very far from the ideas of those (and there are such people) who desire to enable merchants to send telegrams to the end of the earth at the cost of the British taxpayer. That is not a proposition that I am at all prepared to undertake. I am entirely opposed to the ideas of those persons who desire to substitute a general system of Government telegraphs all over the world from the present system which now prevails. I think I have shown, on the other hand, where there are political or even sentimental reasons in favour of the Government assisting the development of telegraphic communication with our colonies, as it certainly was strong in the case of the Pacific cable. I have not been indisposed to incur considerable liability in a case of that kind. (Hear, hear.) I hope that the Pacific cable when established will not be worked at a loss—that is certainly not the intention of any of the parties to the scheme; yet I do anticipate that there will be a reduction in the rates between England and Australia, which is part of the case which has been brought before me to-day. With regard to the Indian case, of course you are aware that three years ago an attempt was made by the Post Office to obtain a reduction of the rates between England and India, in concert with the Indian Government, from the Inter-European Company and from the Eastern Company. That was, I think, really defeated by the opposition of the Eastern Company. Now, the last deputation I had in this room was a deputation of the Eastern Company, making a terrible grievance of the action with regard to the Pacific cable, and as we are quite unable—at least, so I am informed—to compel these companies at the present moment to vary their charges, I think you will see that just now would not be the moment at which the Eastern Company would be likely to alter the answer given to the Post Office in 1896. On the other hand, I think you will all feel that we should be in a very great difficulty if we attempted to bargain either with the Eastern Company or with the Indo-European Company on the basis of a subsidy from Parliament for a reduction of rates. (Hear, hear.) Sir Edward Lawson very properly called attention to the large profits which are now made by both those companies; and to ask the taxpayers of this country to assume a considerable annual burden in order possibly to in-