

Some hon. MEMBERS. Hear, hear.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I said Washington, and I am sorry I made the slip. We did send a commissioner to Washington and we failed.

Mr. FOSTER (Toronto). It lies heavy on your heart.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I am not sorry we did so, but I am sorry that the people of Canada did not view our efforts in what we consider the proper light. If we are to send a commissioner to Australia I do not know any better man than the Minister of Trade and Commerce, who is qualified by his position as head of the department and still better qualified by his enthusiasm in the work and the information he has with regard to it. I would even trust him with the light wines of Australia, and I therefore think that if the hon. gentleman (Mr. Foster) were to go to Australia and associate Mr. Ross with him there might be a possibility of bringing back a trade treaty with our fellow-subjects. But the great difficulty about that arrangement is that both parties to the negotiation would be protectionists, and it is very difficult for a protectionist in one country to convince his fellow-protectionist of another country to make way for him by lowering the tariff.

Mr. FOSTER (Toronto). How was it at the Washington Conference?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. There, we exchanged natural products for natural products. One of the difficulties in that case, and it will be a difficulty in the present case also, is, that there would have to be secret negotiations. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Foster) has suggested that they should sit around the table and consult with each other, and that is an excellent way of doing business and the only proper way to do such business, but last year that procedure was characterized as secret negotiations and as dangerous negotiations. The Minister of Trade and Commerce put that objection most eloquently last year, but let him not be afraid of his own arguments then, let him have secret negotiations with the Australian government if he will, and if he can bring us back a good trade treaty we will approve of it. The Labour party in Australia is composed of protectionists to a large extent, the Fusionist party was composed one-half of protectionists, and it would be difficult for the Minister of Trade and Commerce to persuade the protectionists of Australia to give Canadian manufacturers a preference in their market. They would be something like the protectionists in this country who are ready to give Great Britain a preference on manufactured goods provided the British manufacturer does not compete

with the Canadian manufacturer. My hon. friend will find the Australians most patriotic, but I fear he will find them ready to trade with Canada on such conditions as will not let the Canadian manufacturer compete with the Australian manufacturer in the Australian market. However, let him try his hand at the job, and if he succeeds in bringing us back a good arrangement we will be most anxious to approve of it.

Mr. A. K. MACLEAN (Halifax). I desire to express my feelings of satisfaction at the remarks made by the hon. member for Montreal (Mr. Ames), which were exceedingly interesting and which lucidly put before the House the possibilities of Canadian trade with Australia. I rise to suggest to the Minister of Trade and Commerce that at the conference which is to take place in Ottawa in March next with the representatives of the West Indian Islands, the Canadian government should invite to be present those who are interested in the steamship business between St. John, N. B., Halifax, N. S., and the West Indian islands.

The question of trade between Canada and the West Indian islands is largely one of steamboat transportation, and it is a very difficult question. In some of the recommendations made by the West Indian Commission respecting the steamship service between Canada and the West Indies they are obviously in error. Some of those recommendations are impossible to carry out. I wish to suggest to the hon. Minister of Trade and Commerce that a steamship service between Canada and the West Indies which departs from Halifax is very much hampered by reason of the fact that the steamers are obliged to call at the port of St. John, at which port they secure very little traffic, which traffic the steamboat company could carry as readily by absorbing the increased railway rates between St. John and Halifax, which they are willing to do, thus making Halifax a port of departure throughout the whole year. It might, however, be possible to secure for the port of St. John another steamboat service which would be as much to its advantage as the present one. I rose merely for the purpose of making the suggestion that the hon. Minister of Trade and Commerce avail himself of any information he may secure from persons in St. John and Halifax who have been for many years interested in our trade with the West Indian Islands.

Mr. W. S. MIDDLEBRO (North Grey). Mr. Speaker, I would not have taken part in this debate but that I happen to have received a letter from one of my constituents which illustrates the desirability of larger trade between Canada and the Aus-