

Mr. DUNNING: I have not revised my answer. At least I understood my right hon. friend to ask me if the rates charged by the government merchant marine were the same as those charged by the conference.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Yes.

Mr. DUNNING: That is entirely a different question from the one he now puts into my mouth. He asks me now if the government merchant marine charges the rates set by the conference, implying in his twisting of words—at which he is of course a master, and I defer to him in that regard—something that I did not say. In his twisting of words he is now distorting his question to make my answer mean what I did not intend it to mean at all. I did not intend it to mean that the merchant marine is in any sense controlled or directed by any north Atlantic conference. Whether or not its rates are similar to those charged by the conference I am not in a position to say, but I am able to say that they are not dictated by the conference. Now is that clear?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Yes, it is just as clear as the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee. The minister follows the well-known habit of those who find themselves in a tight corner of their own creation, of attributing to the other side who points it out a splitting of hairs and a trading on words. I wonder who the trader on words is. Is it not he who says that the board may follow the rates or adopt the same rates as the conference, but that that is a very different thing from saying that they adopt the rates set by the conference? This is the distinction drawn by the minister who attributes to me hair-splitting. I am not endeavouring to split hairs. It is not the minister's hairs that are in danger at all; it is his head I am trying to enter. If the rates are the rates the conference sets, then I repeat it makes not one whit of difference whether the board is a member of the conference or not. I am not particular whether the rates are followed because of dictation or because of affiliation or because of affection or because of admiration; the reason is not material to the pocketbook of the producer. What we want to know is: Are they not the same rates? The evidence before the committee last year showed that the so-called divorcement meant nothing whatever because the rates then were the same as the rates had been before. So we are in the position of being asked by the government to close this debate without a particle of information as to whether the position is changed, as to whether or not the absolution

granted the mercantile marine by the conference was of any set or practical value. We are asked simply to take the assurance of the minister that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine is not a member of the conference, and that if they follow the rates which the conference sets they do not do it because they have to, but because they like to.

Mr. SPEAKER: The reply of the hon. member for Marquette will close the debate.

Hon. J. A. ROBB (Minister of Finance): Before the hon. member for Marquette closes the debate I should like to say a word. My right hon. friend (Mr. Meighen) appears to blame this government because of the operation of the Canadian Government Merchant Marine.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Never at all.

Mr. ROBB: It was a baby that we found on our doorstep when we came into office. We do know that upon the first inquiry we made it was discovered that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine was working in co-operation with the North Atlantic Conference, and objection was taken to this state of affairs. I do not say that the government merchant marine became members of the conference when my right hon. friend was Prime Minister, but I do say we were surprised to find this to be the case after coming into office.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Surprised?

Mr. ROBB: In 1923 or about that time.

Mr. MEIGHEN: No, it came out in this House over and over again and the government knew all about it.

Mr. ROBB: And they were in the combine when we assumed office.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Certainly, and for two years afterwards.

Mr. ROBB: Very well, we have the admission of my right hon. friend that they were in the combine when we assumed office. We know they withdrew from the conference in February 1925. We also know that the members of the north Atlantic conference are not trying to help the Canadian
4 p.m. Government Merchant Marine business. I have here a letter, received no later than this morning, complaining that the Canadian merchant marine have two vessels leaving a Canadian port with cargo on the same dates as those selected for some of the vessels that are in the conference. They would like us to withdraw from that