

*Ocean Shipping Rates*

Hon. CHARLES A. DUNNING (Minister of Railways and Canals): My contribution to the resolution will be brief, and necessarily so. I waited with some interest to hear my hon. friend (Mr. Mullins) who introduced the resolution say something in support of it, and I am still waiting. I do not believe that the hon. gentleman mentioned the resolution at all. It reads:

That in the opinion of this House, the Canadian Government Merchant Marine should withdraw at once from the North Atlantic conference and should be operated independently of any association, conference or combine of steamship lines with the sole object of conferring the greatest possible advantage upon the Canadian producer.

The hon. member did not discuss this resolution at all. Perhaps he is aware now that there is no point in it for the reason that it is more than one year late: the Canadian Government Merchant Marine withdrew from the conference in February, 1925. There is, therefore, no object whatever in pressing this resolution upon the House at this stage. I do not think I need say more.

Mr. MEIGHEN: May I ask the minister a question? Do they not at the present time charge the same rates as the conference fixes?

Mr. DUNNING: So far as I am aware, that has nothing to do with the resolution. I am not in a position to answer the question just now, but I should be glad to get the information for my hon. friend. The point of the resolution is whether the Canadian Government Merchant Marine is a member of the conference. The answer is it withdrew in February, 1925, and is not now associated with any body of steamship owners. As to rates, I shall be glad to get the information for my hon. friend.

Right Hon. ARTHUR MEIGHEN (Leader of the Opposition): The new Minister of Railways (Mr. Dunning) has summarily dismissed the resolution and seems to assume that the House will be satisfied with his assurance that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine withdrew from the conference in February, 1925. The House, however, will put a question mark after the word "withdrew," having some doubt as to what its meaning is. The government has evidently a dictionary of its own and applies such meanings as may suit the occasion. It is true that in the debate of last year on the Petersen contract, and as well in the evidence given before the committee, assertions were then made that the Canadian merchant marine had formally withdrawn. Some of the evidence, however, went to show that while they had

[Mr. Mullins.]

formally withdrawn they still sat in, whatever may be the government's dictionary meaning of that term. They "sat in" while not being members and, I presume, not voting. They sat in and took such part as the sitter-in is entitled to, whatever that may be. But the more important fact, indeed, the only fact that is of any consequence at all, is the question of rates. If the rates are the rates dictated by the conference, it will not make any difference to the people of Canada whether they are members of the conference or sitters-in or sitters-out of it. If they follow the rates the conference fixes, then it is equally the same to the pocket of the shipper whether they are inside in the ring or outside in the vestibule. The minister comes into the House supposed to be in a position to discuss the resolution, and he does not know yet whether or not the merchant marine, which this government owns and which it is operating through a directorate, actually obeys the dictates of the conference. This is a matter of indifference to him so long as it formally asserts its nominal independence, or at least proclaims itself not a member in full standing: of the conference, paying the fees. Now,—

Mr. DUNNING: Will the right hon. gentleman permit me? I am in a position to state absolutely that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine does not obey the dictates of any conference. My hon. friend is attributing to me statements I did not make.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I attributed to the minister the effect of a statement he made before, which was that he did not know whether they followed the rates fixed by the conference or not.

Mr. DUNNING: No; I must again object. I made no such statement. I said that I could not inform my hon. friend as to the rates charged. I did not say that I did not know whether or not they followed the conference rates.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The minister will have some difficulty in confirming his present impression from the notes of Hansard. I did not ask him if he knew the rates: I would not expect him to carry the rates in his mind. I asked whether it was not a fact that the government merchant marine followed the rates of the conference, and I got in reply the statement that he did not know, but that he would look it up. The necessities of the case, however, seem to warrant the minister in revising that answer. He is at liberty to revise it, but not to tell me that he did not make it.