

*Ocean Shipping Rates*

have another objection to this particular method, which has been largely voiced by hon. members to our right, and it is this: That the agreement as brought down does not give adequate control on the part of this government. It does definitely stipulate what this government shall do, and what this country shall do—it definitely states what assistance shall be given by ourselves—but it does not definitely state, in my opinion, under what conditions the ships themselves must operate. For instance the contract does not state, although it may be implied, what commodities shall be carried at reduced rates. It is left to the discretion of one party or the other; it is left to the discretion of the steamship company itself or with the government. I do not consider that is a healthy state of affairs. I think if an agreement is entered into it should be made so clear and so binding, that not only are our obligations set forth but also all the obligations of the other party of the contract. It does not state, for example, the numbers of sailings that must take place. It does not state that there must be sailings at any given intervals. It does not state how many sailings there must be in the course of a year—it simply states that so many vessels must be employed. Thus if vessels were laid up and were not giving the service the subsidy would still continue, and to my mind that is something which must be considered. We are not criticizing this method because we object to control. We are giving the government credit for having taken cognizance of the seriousness of the situation, we are giving them credit for having brought forward some measure which would suggest relief; we are giving them that credit, but we also feel that the method suggested is inadequate.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Would my hon. friend suggest a better method?

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I will come to that in a moment if the Prime Minister will permit me. Therefore, what action can this House take? It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the only reference it logically can take is the reference to a committee. But in that connection may I point this out: When the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Low) made that suggestion we felt that it was a reasonable one. He suggested—and I think I can use his own words—"that it be sent to a special committee who should have the power to ask questions and make suggestions". And may I say, in passing, that asking questions and making suggestions is one of the best things we do.

[Mr. Speakman.]

Mr. SUTHERLAND: Did the minister not state that it was a cast-iron contract which could not be changed in any particular?

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I think the hon. gentleman is attributing the statement to the wrong minister, and is also anticipating what I am about to say. If this committee is empowered only to ask questions and make suggestions, if there is no intention of putting any of the suggestions into effect, then I say the committee would be a mere farce. And yet what are we to think? The statement was made by the Prime Minister—and I must say I listened with some apprehension to it—that this agreement must stand as it is; that it is susceptible of no trimming—to use the exact words of the right hon. gentleman. Now, Mr. Speaker we know the elasticity of the word "trimming". When your butcher trims your roast he removes any objectionable fragments. When the milliner trims a new chapeau for the madam she adds a touch here and a feather there with entrancing results. I am sorry the hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff) is not in his seat at present because I look to him for some assistance when in deep water. I understand that in navigation you "trim your sails" thereby coming a little closer to the wind. But this agreement cannot be trimmed.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I ask my hon. friend if he thinks it is a correct method to enter into a contract with other parties and make that contract subject to all kinds of change? The contract is subject to the approval or disapproval of parliament; that is the object of referring it to a committee. If the committee, after studying the contract and hearing all the circumstances, come to the conclusion that it is not in the public interest it is not only their privilege but their duty to so inform parliament and throw the contract to one side. But if, after having heard all the circumstances, they come to the conclusion that the government has acted wisely in making the contract I do not think they should find fault with the government in having first taken the only step that was possible to get a contract and to carry out the wishes of parliament.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I hardly think the Prime Minister has quite caught my point.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes, I have.

Mr. SPEAKMAN: I quite appreciate that the committee has the power to report for or against this agreement, but I appreciate also the fact that in view of the statement of the right hon. the Prime Minister the committee