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1901-08-16

House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker took the chair at 2 p.m., and read prayers.

PETITIONS

Mr. McCay presented petitions from the residents of Daylesford, Dry Diggings, and Yandoit in favour of passing into law clauses 54 and 55 of the Post and Telegraph Bill.

Mr. Salmon presented a similar petition from the residents of Talbot, Majorca, and Amherst.

Petitions received.

QUESTIONS

LANDING OF AFGHANS IN MELBOURNE

Mr POYNTON

- I wish to direct the attention of the Prime Minister to a statement in to-day's Argus, that some 80 Afghans were landed in Victoria yesterday from a French mailboat. Seeing that the several States of the Commonwealth have pronounced very strongly in favour of having a white Australia, I wish to know whether the Prime Minister will undertake to do as was done on one memorable occasion by Sir Henry Parkes, and prevent the States from being inundated by aliens of this class, pending the passing of legislation on the subject.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

- I had not observed the paragraph to which the honorable member has been so good as to direct my attention. The action taken by Sir Henry Parkes was to prevent the landing of a number of Chinamen in Sydney. I was not aware that a number of Afghans were about to be landed, so that there the parallel between the two cases ceases. I am glad, however, to have been questioned on this subject, because it enables me to assure the House of two things. The first is that, so far as legislation is concerned, the Commonwealth can do nothing until it legislates for itself, because matters are regulated at the ports by the laws of the various States. There is, perhaps, however, a reserve power in the Commonwealth to deal with certain questions of this kind in a manner that is sanctioned by international law. I shall do my best to inquire into the whole question, so that in case of any anticipated landing of aliens I may be in a position to know what powers we have, and to see that they are reasonably and properly exercised.

CUSTOMS STATISTICS

Mr McCAY

- I desire to ask the honorable the Minister for Trade and Customs when we may expect the information which has been promised with regard to imports and exports and Tariff matters in the various States. I hope it will be furnished at an early date in order that we may study it before the Tariff comes on.

Minister for Trade and Customs

Mr KINGSTON

- No pains are being spared to expedite the preparation of the statistics required, but the wealth of information desired by the House renders it impossible to furnish it in a day. However, no time will be lost.

ALLEGED DISCOURTESY TO QUEENSLAND

Mr McDONALD

- I desire to ask the Prime Minister if his attention has been drawn to a paragraph in one of the papers to the effect that the Premier of Queensland has written to him, complaining of discourtesy on the part of the Federal Government towards that State? I should like to know if there is any truth in the statement, and, if so, whether the Prime Minister will lay the correspondence on the table.

Mr BARTON

- No letter has come before me containing any such complaint. If it is in my office, it has not yet come under my notice. If there is such a letter, I shall take care to show that there has been no discourtesy on the part of this Government, but on the contrary, in every particular, the most sedulous courtesy, towards every one of the States. If there is any correspondence, I will lay it on the table.

GERMAN LOTTERY CORRESPONDENCE

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Sir LANGDON BONYTHON

asked the Minister representing the Postmaster-General, upon notice -
Whether in view of the large number of the prospectus of the 252nd German Money Lottery, to be drawn on the 12th November, 1901, which are being circulated in this State, the Postmaster-General will, under the powers conferred by the Victorian Postal Act, stop all letters addressed to Albert Jarmulowsky, Schwerin, Germany.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

(for Sir Philip Fysh). The answer to the honorable member's question is as follows -

The matter has not previously been brought under the notice of the department. The Postmaster-General will cause inquiries to be made with a view of determining what action he will take under the circumstances..

PAPER

Mr. Barton laid on the table

A return furnished at the request of Sir Edward Braddon on the 5th July, showing the revenue derived from the carriage of newspapers in New South Wales and Victoria, and information on cognate questions.

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INTER-STATE NAVIGATION

Mr O'MALLEY

- I move that, in the interest of the Inter-State navigation, it is desirable that the Government prohibit subsidized foreign steam-ship companies, manned by either coloured or white labour, from carrying passengers or goods between Commonwealth ports, and that Inter-State navigation traffic should be regulated.

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Mr SPEAKER

- Before the honorable member proceeds with his motion I wish to inform the House that my attention has been drawn to the latter words of the motion, and I desire to say to the honorable member who is about to move it that if his speech discloses that these words refer to a matter that is already dealt with in the Inter-State Commission Bill, which is now on the paper, I shall find it necessary to excise the words from the motion. If, however, it is disclosed that these words do not refer to what is dealt with in the Inter-State Commission Bill, it will be proper to include them.

Mr. O'MALLEY. - I will not apologize for trespassing on the indulgence of the House to-day on so important a motion as this; I propose to leave all the statistical matter on the subject to be dealt with by the honorable member for Melbourne Ports, who is a born statistician, and I will simply refer to a few of the important points. The party that I have the honour to belong to - the equal rights party - hope to see established in the Commonwealth an Act of Parliament fixing a living wage. This, however, cannot possibly be done in the great labour employing department of navigation while we permit foreign ships manned with coloured labour to compete with our own home boats. In the United States and Canada they have practically the same law dealing with this matter. No foreign ship can carry goods between Montreal and Quebec or between San Francisco and New York, and we lately had an experience showing how the American law operates, in connexion with the joint service that was maintained by the Union Steam-ship Company and the Oceanic Steam-ship Company of San Francisco, between Sydney and San Francisco, calling at Honolulu and Auckland. As soon as the Hawaiian Islands were taken over by the United States Government, the Navigation Act operated to the extent of preventing the Union Company's boats from trading between Honolulu and San Francisco, and the contract had to be taken over, wholly by the American company. With regard to the American law, which has never been changed since 1793, I find this statement in the Dictionary of American Politics -

Foreign vessels cannot engage in our coasting trade, which is held to include voyages from Atlantic to Pacific ports. American vessels cease to be such if even a part-owner (except in a few instances) resides abroad for a short time. An American vessel once transferred by any process to foreigners can never sail under our flag again. Duty must be paid on the value of all repairs which an American vessel makes in foreign ports on her return to this country. Restrictions are placed on the repairing of foreign vessels in our ports with imported materials. Vessels engaged in trade to port not in North or Central America, and a few not specified adjacent places (except fishing and pleasure vessels), pay a tax on entry of six cents

per ton of their burden, but the maximum aggregate tax in any one year does not exceed thirty cents. The law of Canada is precisely the same. I wish to press on honorable members the desirability of enabling our Australian merchants, ship-owners, and shareholders in Australian shipping companies to build up a great Inter-State fleet, precisely as has been done in the United States and Canada. When Australian ships have the whole of the traffic between Australian ports, we may call on the ship-owners to pay a living wage. Foreign ships coming to this country, manned by coloured labour, will not come under the arbitration laws we hope to pass, whereas we could call on the owners of Australian ships to appear before Australian courts for the settlement of all disputes. The big ocean-going boats are heavily subsidized by foreign nations, and yet I understand that on the French and German vessels a great many of the men employed depend on tips, a condition with which Australian young men will not comply. The question is how we can enable

Australians to build up an Australian fleet ; and the only possible way is to give the Australian trade to local vessels. The lascars and other coloured people employed on the large ocean-going steamers do not live in the same way as do Australians ; but, having no conception of a civilized method of life, can exist on the smell of an oil-rag. Is it fair and honest for us to permit these boats to carry all the best of our trade, seeing that one big steamer is able to sweep the whole of the traffic between ports? These are questions on which we ought to carefully meditate, and see what can be done for the benefit of Australians.

Thousands of pounds a year are paid to the P. and O. Company for carrying European mails ; while not one of the local steam-ship companies is subsidized for a penny, unless it be for carrying mails to some out of the way port, where very few people live. The big European steamers buy all, 'or virtually all, their provisions in Europe, and pay no customs duties on them in Australia; while the Australian companies have to pay duty whether they get their stores from abroad or from our own people, thus giving employment to Australian labour, and helping to maintain the Government. There is a vast difference between the wages paid in Australia and those paid on the European steamers ; but it is not possible to maintain a proper scale of wages so long as we allow unfair competition, though I have no objection to competition that is fair. It may be said that ship-building cannot be carried on in Australia, but that is not true. Some 25 years ago it was said that ships could not be built in the United States, whereas, to-day, there is hardly a river in the States or in Canada where some kind of shipbuilding is not being carried on.

Mr Fowler

- Ships were being built in the United States 150 years ago.

Mr O'MALLEY

- Mud-scows. For a ship which costs £100,000 the whole of the raw material, including iron, copper, and everything else, does not cost more than £5,000, so that if these vessels were built here, £95,000 would go into Australian labour, and turn Australian muscle and brain into a circulating medium which would be legal tender throughout the whole world. The question of the great interests of navigation as an instrument of commerce between the various States is narrowed down to one point. I do not want the Opposition to think that I am going to make an attack on free-trade, and I hope there will be no discussion this afternoon on the fiscal question. What I am advocating has nothing at all to do with that question, but is simply the protection of Australian labour in Australia, though not the kind of protection the Opposition talk of.

Sir William McMillan

- Even the honorable member for Melbourne Ports smiles at that.

Mr O'MALLEY

- I agree with the honorable member for Melbourne Ports that protection is a faith, just as free-trade is a religious faith with my friends opposite. I hope honorable members will carefully consider this motion from all stand-points, and see whether it is not worth our while giving our own people a reasonable measure of protection, at least, for their own steam-ships, , so' that we may have better vessels and better services, and, further, that we may have a fleet in case there should be the hostile invasion we hear about. We must all admit that, in case of war, the big ocean-going ships would all be gone, and all that we would have to depend on would be our own ships in Australia.

Mr MAUGER

- I recognise the great importance and far-reaching character of the subject-matter of the motion. Both capital and labour, and, if I may say so, the producing interests of Australia, are directly and closely

interested in the shipping question. When visiting North Queensland recently, I noticed that the greater the inroads coloured and alien labour made, the greater opposition there was to its abolition from that class of the community known as capitalists and traders. The people known as the working classes were, I found, unanimously and bitterly opposed to kanaka labour, while, on the contrary, the station owner, the station manager, the shopkeeper, and the tradesman were all as strongly of opinion that kanaka labour could not be done without.

Mr SPEAKER

- The honorable member must not discuss that question.

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Mr MAUGER

- I was about to point out that the alien labour used in the shipping trade is affecting not only the labourer per se, but also the capitalist, and that the latter is beginning to recognise the fact. Chinese and Japanese are becoming competitors not only with labour, but with trade, and tradesmen are becoming more unitedly opposed to the competition. France, Germany, Italy, and the United States, as well as Spain and Austria, are adopting the policy, with more or less success, of placing their merchant navies on such a footing as to insure for themselves their own coastal trade at least. What the United States has effected in one direction is shown in a recently published report of the Commissioner of Navigation. It appears that the vessels under the United States' coastal laws number 21,397, amounting to 4,015,992 gross tonnage - the largest in the history of America, and greater than the coastal tonnage of any other nation in the world. Of that large total, 2,476,011 tons is represented by steamers. I find from Mulhall that the total of the world's earnings is placed at £101,800,000, of which £93,400,000 is credited to European countries. The earnings of British ships absorb one-half of that very large total, and that is doubtless the reason why America, France, and Germany are turning their attention to this all-important branch of commerce and trade. One of the principal reasons for my seconding the motion is the fact that the proposal bears very closely on labour, and on the class of competition to which labour is more and more being subjected. The honorable member for Tasmania, Mr. O'Malley, pointed out that the Orient, the P. and O., and other large ocean steamers were not paying anything like the same rate of wages as that paid by Australian companies on our coastal steamers, and I have some exceedingly interesting figures on that point. I find that on the coastal steamers, able seamen are paid the union rate of £6 10s. per month, while the Orient Company pay £4, the P. and O. Company £4 5s., and the German Company £2 17s. per month. That is for white labour. For firemen, the Australian steam-ship companies pay £8 10s. per month, the Orient Company £4 10s. per month, and the P. and O. Company £1 4s. per month. That is owing to the fact that coolie labour is employed at this particular class of work by the P. and O. Company. If it can be proved that this class of labour is anything nearly as efficient as is white labour, the very great difference between £4 10s. and £1 4s. per month must impel the owners of these steamers to replace British seamen more and more by coolie labour, o

An Honorable Member.-- What about the question of fares 1

Mr MAUGER

- The ocean-going steamers have lately been reducing the fares and coming more and more into competition with Inter-State vessels. Some little time back the fares of the former were higher, but lately they have been reduced, till now there is very little difference between the two rates, and that difference is rather in favour of the ocean-going steamers.

Mr Henry Willis

- The fares of the ocean-going steamers are 50 per cent, higher.

Mr MAUGER

- They were, but I can assure my honorable friend they have been, reduced.

Mr Henry Willis

- I have made inquiries recently.

Mr MAUGER

- I think that the honorable member is wrong. The Australian steamers pay firemen and coal trimmers £6 10s. per month, as against the Orient Company's £4, and the P. and O. Company's 16s. 8d.

Mr Manifold

- Does the honorable member call the P. and O. Company a foreign company ?

Mr MAUGER

- It is foreign so far as Australian trade is concerned. I include as foreign, vessels which are subsidized by means of mail contracts, and which employ coloured labour. The low rates paid by the P. and O. Company are undoubtedly due to the employment of coloured labour. I have here the total amount of the extra wages paid per annum by the Western Australian steamers, as compared with that paid by the European companies. The Marko pays -£10,455 annually over and above the amount paid by the Orient Company; £13,262 more than is paid by the P. and O. Company; and £19,330 over and above what is paid by the German steamers. The Gabo pays in wages £11,456 more than the Orient Company; £13,443 more than the P. and O. Company; and £18,896 more than the German vessels. For the period of twelve months ended 30th September last, some 10,700 passengers were carried between the various Inter-State ports of Australia, principally by the P. and O. Company, the Orient Company, the North German Lloyd Company, the Messageries Maritimes Company, and the various companies trading to China and Japan. A carefully prepared estimate proves that the amount of passage money through this business alone, represents approximately £66,000. Since these figures were compiled some eight or nine months ago, we have developed the White Star line, which trades from Liverpool and calls at the different coastal ports. The last two White Star liners arriving from Western Australia carried 157 and 50 passengers respectively. To a large extent these European vessels secure their stores in the home market. Taking half-a-dozen different coastal steamers, I find that no less than £305,000 per annum is spent in stores which are in the main Australian products, and the money for their purchase is circulated in Australian markets. These are facts which honorable members would do well to consider. I recognise that this is altogether too big a question to be dealt with by an abstract motion such as this. There are various interests connected with it, such as those of labour, trades, capital, and of Inter-State and foreign companies. To my mind it would be in the interests of the companies, of the Seamen's Union, and of the Commonwealth, if an Inter-State conference could be called together to consider this matter in all its phases. I would remind my honorable friends that New Zealand has tried to face this problem. I find that section 10 of the New Zealand Shipping and Seamen's Act of 1896 contains the following provision : - Notwithstanding anything contained in the principal Act or any amendment thereof, it is hereby declared -that if a master, owner, or agent of any ship engages seamen in the colony or having engaged them abroad, employs them in the colony, such seamen whilst so employed shall be paid and may recover the current rate of wages ruling for the time being in the colony, and in the former case the engagement may "be determined in the colony at any time after the ship's arrival at her final port of discharge in the colony consequent on the completion of a round voyage, by 24 hours' previous notice on either side; provided that this section shall not apply to ships arriving from abroad with passengers or cargo, but not trading in the colony further or otherwise than for the purpose of discharging such original passengers or cargo in the colony, and there shipping fresh passengers or cargo to be carried abroad.

On making inquiries I am informed that this provision is not working satisfactorily. A number of difficulties have arisen, and at the present time the New Zealand Government are considering an amendment in order to secure greater success in connexion with its operation. But in any provision of this kind something like uniformity is necessary. Although New Zealand is not one of the States of the Commonwealth, I think that the navigation laws of the Commonwealth and of that colony should be brought into line. The honorable member for Tasmania, Mr. O'Malley, alluded to America, which is exceedingly emphatic in this direction. In an Act of 1898 I find the following : -

No merchandise shall be imported (transported), under penalty of forfeiture thereof, from one port of the United States to another port of] the United States, in a vessel belonging wholly or in part to a subject of any foreign power; but this section shall not be construed to prohibit the sailing of any foreign vessel from one to another port of the United States, provided no merchandise, other than that imported in such vessel from some foreign port, and which shall not have been unladen, shall be carried from one port or place to another in the United States. No foreign vessel shall transport passengers between ports or places in the United States, either directly or by way -of a foreign port under a penalty of 200 dollars for each passenger so transported and landed.

This legislation, it will be seen, is absolutely prohibitory as regards the conveyance of both goods and passengers between any ports in the United States. " And yet it only reflects what ' France and other

European nations, anxious to conserve their coastal trade to the home ship-owners and seamen, are doing. New Zealand has tried to do the same thing, and America has succeeded in her efforts to secure for her coastal trade the work to be done upon her own coast. Canada has also faced the matter with very great success. The total wages paid by intercolonial ship-owners on the Western Australian passenger steamers over and above the P. and O. Company is something like £9,977 per annum. I cannot see how the Seamen's Union can expect the intercolonial companies to continue paying their minimum rate - which is low enough in all conscience - if they are to be brought into such unfair competition with these ocean-going steamers.

Mr Mahon

- How is it that they have existed so long in that case t

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Mr MAUGER

- Because they have existed, surely the honorable member would not urge that they should be asked to continue to exist with so heavy a handicap upon them. Surely he will not reason that the Seamen's Union have succeeded in getting as high, a wage as he would desire its members to secure 1 If that be so, we should see in the first instance that the employer is assured of something like reasonable competition. Subsequently we could exact from him a reasonable wage.

Mr Fowler

- The ship-owners in Australia are a poor starving lot, are they not 1

Mr MAUGER

- The question is-" Are the ship-owners subjected to unfair competition ? Are they upon as fair a basis as the ship-owners of New Zealand, Canada, or America" 1

Mr Fowler

- According to the honorable member's argument, they ought to be starving.

Mr MAUGER

- Is our coastal trade upon a proper basis ? Are we subjecting our intercolonial steam-ship companies to unfair competition 1 Is it not desirable to insure for Australia, with its 8,500 miles of coastline, its own carrying trade % If it is, we should follow the example of America and Canada.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- This motion - innocent as it appears to be at the first reading - will, if carried, have a very wide range, and a tremendous influence upon the trade of the whole of the Commonwealth. I would ask the honorable member for Tasmania, Mr. O'Malley, whether in framing this motion he meant to virtually build a wall of China around the Commonwealth of Australia? Does he mean that foreign subsidized companies, such as the North German Lloyds, the Messageries Maritimes and other similar companies, to which Australia has been very greatly indebted in the past for the increase of her traffic, shall be debarred, the moment they touch an Australian port, from trading between our ports % The honorable member for Melbourne Ports addressed this House as if the question were one that involved the manning of ships by coloured labour.

Mr Mauger

- So it does very closely.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- I would point out, as I did by interjection, that the very wording of the motion suggests that, irrespective of whether these steamers, which are subsidized by foreign companies, are manned by coloured or by . white labour, the same conditions will obtain. This is a very big question indeed. I do not intend for one instant to object to my honorable friend bringing such .a motion before the House, but I want to know how far this system of protection is to go.

Mr O'Malley

- It is not protection, it is simply justice.

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- It is prohibition. No matter how desirous, we may be of opening up trade relations with other lands - and I hope that in the not far distant future Australian products will be of such extent that we shall be able, not only to enlarge our trade relations with France and Germany, two countries which are at present running

lines of steamers here, but with other nations of Europe - this motion will be a barrier in the way. It provides that whether foreign steam-ships are manned by white or coloured crews they are to be debarred from carrying either passengers or goods between Commonwealth ports, in order that the small colonial companies shall be absolutely protected ; in order that companies, such as Howard Smith and Sons, and the Australian Union Steam-ship Company, and others which may be termed colonial shipping companies, shall have an absolute monopoly of the Australian trade. This is to be done so that the local companies, if they choose to combine - and doubtless they will, as they have done on previous occasions - shall have a monopoly of the trade between Australian ports ' to such an extent' as to be able to virtually dictate to the producers the rates at which their produce shall be carried. By way of illustration, I wish to refer to the Inter-State Commission Bill which is before the House, and which deals with questions of shipping. The power to control the rates between ports has been strenuously objected to by the very people whom the honorable member for Tasmania, is now seeking, in the most unfair way, to protect. It is objected by them, that no Inter-State Commission should be permitted to have power to regulate rates between ports. They urge that the Inter-State Commission should not have any right to touch shipping on the coast. Does not the honorable member seek to still further clinch the monopoly which these people enjoy by providing, apart from the opinion of a large section of Parliament that they should not be controlled by an Inter-State Commission so far as their rates are concerned, but that they should be protected from the competition of foreign vessels, irrespective of whether those vessels* are manned by Europeans, Germans, Frenchmen, or citizens of other nations, who are on friendly terms with Great Britain? He proposes that they shall be barred, the moment they touch an Australian port, from entering into competition with these Inter-State steam-ship companies.

Mr Mauger

- America has already done that.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- We have had America and New South Wales, and other places quoted to us again and again. We are a new Commonwealth, a new Parliament, and although we may perhaps be guided to some extent by the experience of older countries, we are not going to be bound, I hope, by what America has done, or by what has been done in an adjoining State in determining our course of action. We are here to assist in perfecting a new piece of machinery, which we hope will work for the good of all sections' of the community, whether they be the producers, the labourers, or the commercial traders. I do not want us to follow the example of America, which is the most protection-ridden country in the world, and which rightly or wrongly has been held up as the country where the most bribery and corruption in connexion with parliamentary institutions obtains. This motion opens up a question which it would be well for Parliament to most carefully consider. Are we going to shut out altogether all foreign ships, irrespective of the advantage that Australia may gain in the way of cheap freights for the carriage of her produce to the countries from which these vessels come, and where our best markets are situated? Are we going to hamper these foreign companies by saying, first of all, as we attempt to say in our Customs Bill - " The moment you touch at Albany on the one coast, or Thursday Island or Port Darwin on the other, you shall not only pay duty on the stores you want, but you shall not carry one package of cargo, because by doing so you will interfere with our little colonial companies." If we are going to carry protection to that extent then it will be a very poor look-out for the best commercial interests of the Commonwealth. I would urge the House to reject the motion.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

. - No doubt the subject which is covered by this motion is an extremely interesting one, but I think I ought to be able to ask the House not to come to a decision on a matter of this kind in the present circumstances. A great deal that has been said, especially by the honorable member for Melbourne Ports, is very useful information to every honorable member of this House, and it may be that the time occupied in the conveyance of that information has not been time wasted. I think, however, that that honorable member, as well as the honorable mover of the motion, will see that nothing is to be gained by attempting to put an abstract declaration of this kind on the records of the House. In the first place, it is necessary that the inquiry which the Minister for Trade and Customs informs me he is making into the whole subject, with a view to taking such action as may be reasonable and politic in the circumstances, should go on.

That, in itself, is sufficient reason for not forcing an abstract declaration such as this on the House at the present time. My honorable friends who are interested in this motion will see the force of that. And further, my belief is that another session of this Parliament will not go by without this Government carrying a Navigation and Shipping Act, and it is of the most intimate consequence to such an Act that we should know, in framing it, what is the policy which the Government has arrived at. That can only be arrived at by very close inquiry on a subject of this kind. I do not want to trouble the House with any further remarks on the motion. I will not enter into its controversial or fiscal aspect at all. I do not think this is the stage for that, nor am I at any time anxious to force the fiscal subject before the House until we come to deal with the Tariff.

Sir William McMillan

- We have to fight the other thing out first.

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Mr BARTON

- What the other thing is I do not know, but there is no forcing of the fiscal question on the House before the Tariff is brought forward. We can leave little questions of difference between us in regard to that matter for to-day. Let us turn our attention to this more serious aspect of the case that, while there may be perfect power in our hands to deal with questions of this kind by law, nevertheless it not only depends upon inquiry as to the facts, but also upon other and more serious considerations with regard to foreign powers. I have little doubt of the right of the Commonwealth to legislate as it pleases in respect to the matter under review. But there is a question of right and a question of policy involved, and that question of policy can only be determined after inquiry as to the facts, and upon consideration of our mutual relations with the rest of the world. All these things must be inquired into. Let me add with regard to the InterState Commission Bill that matters which are cognate to and involved in the determination of this subject are referred to in clause 2 of that measure, which deals with the interpretation of external or Inter-State commerce, and also in clauses 15, 18, 19, 20, perhaps clause 28, and certainly clause 44. Sub-clause (2) ' of clause 44 deals with reports which may be required by the commission as to the earnings and receipts of carriers engaged in external or Inter-State commerce, from each branch of business, and from all sources, the working and other expenses, their rates or regulations concerning fares or freights, the amount of capital invested in their business, the dividends paid, and so on. These are powers to be given, in certain cases, to the commission. It is quite clear that a Bill which deals with these matters deals in part with the subjectmatter of this motion. Upon that consideration, therefore, as well as the others which I have urged, I think I shall be advising my honorable friends well in counselling them to withdraw the motion.

Mr. O'MALLEY(Tasmania).- In view of the conciliatory remarks of the Prime Minister, and the fact that this is the last Friday for private members' business

Mr Barton

- For a time.

Mr O'MALLEY

- Being a democrat, I am most anxious to give other honorable members a chance, because that is the spirit of democracy. In view of that fact, and the fact that the Prime Minister has declared that the Minister of Trade and Customs is endeavouring to arrive at a solution of this problem, and that we are going to have a law on navigation passed in the second session of this Parliament, I will, with the permission of the House, withdraw my motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

AUSTRALIAN TROOPS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Mr PIESSE

- I move-

That, having regard to the patriotic services rendered by citizens of the several States of Australia in undertaking the burthen and risks of actual warfare in South Africa, it is expedient that a return be prepared and laid before this House, showing in detail : -

Particulars of name, residence, and calling when enrolled for service of all so enrolled.

The present position of each of the surviving members of the several contingents, showing especially

whether the returned soldier is at a disadvantage in obtaining similar occupation to that formerly held. Particulars of men partially or wholly disabled, and specification in each case of any allowance, compensation, or pension allotted.

In the case of deceased soldiers leaving dependents, what provision (either by way of life assurance or otherwise) has been made for such dependents.

I do not think it is necessary for me to dwell upon the first statement in this motion, with regard to the patriotic services rendered by the citizens of the several States of Australia. I am sure that it would take an abler speaker than myself to render the full tribute of praise that is due to those of our citizens who went to take their part in fighting the Empire's cause in South Africa. Although there was to some extent a forcing of the hands of the various Governments in this matter, and the movement was a popular one rather than one fomented in the first instance by the Executives of the various States, and although it may be said that these men took their own risks, it was generally accepted by the Government and the people that the men went with the full consent and approbation of the great majority of their fellow citizens. They went with a promise that they should not suffer through going; that those who were left behind would be cared for; and that those who returned would not be at a disadvantage when they came back. When these men went away, doubts were entertained as to the position that would be found for them, and speculation was indulged in as to whether it would not be their lot to be placed in charge of lines of communication or to be employed as purely garrison soldiers; it was regarded as questionable whether they would go through the actual stress of warfare. They have, however, gone beyond all that was expected of them, and there have been no men engaged in that conflict who have received a greater meed of praise, who have borne themselves more bravely, or discharged their duties more faithfully than the men who went from Australia. Therefore, I think we should at least concern ourselves in finding out whether the virtual promises that were made to the men who went from here have been fulfilled. We should ascertain whether they have lost at all through going there; whether they have succeeded in finding occupation on their return; whether those who have been wounded or disabled have been properly provided for; and whether the families left behind by those whose lives have been sacrificed as a pledge of their great devotion to the Empire's cause have received what is due to them. I do not know whether all these questions can be answered in the affirmative and satisfactorily; but I have heard sufficient to justify me in asking the House to agree to an inquiry being made so that we may lie under no charge that we have left those who have given us good Service, and borne their part so bravely, to suffer any loss without making inquiry to find out the facts. After the inquiry has been made and the facts ascertained, if it is found that further action is needed, it will be for the House to determine what is the proper thing to be done. In view of the fact that the Commonwealth has taken over the Defence department, and having regard also to the circumstance that the inquiries will have to be made for the most part through this department, I think this is a matter that the Commonwealth Government should take up.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

. - I have no objection to this return being obtained, as far as it is possible for the Commonwealth to obtain it. As to the object of my honorable friend in dealing with the return when obtained, I wish to facilitate his acquiring every such information as will enable him to open up the question in the way that seems best to him. It must be remembered, however, that the contingents were sent away, at the outset, long before the Commonwealth was instituted. They were despatched by the States, and when the department of Defence was transferred, a step was taken which, I think, had the concurrence of honorable members. That is, that with relation to all these contingents the administration begun by the States should be continued by them until the services of the contingents were dispensed with - that is to say, such contingents as were up to that time arranged. That being so, the information on all these subjects can not only be supplemented best by the States, but they can afford the major part of it. I propose, therefore, to amend the motion by moving -

That, after the word "expedient," line 4, the words "that the Governments of the several States be approached, in order" be inserted. I think that this will assist the honorable member for Tasmania, and, with that amendment, I shall make no objection to the motion.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr THOMSON

- We are indebted to the honorable member for Tasmania for having brought this matter forward, and I am sure that the words which have accompanied his motion will be supported by all the members of this House. I think it very desirable that we should show that this Parliament does recognise and will recognise the right to consideration of those men who went forth from Australia in the cause of the Empire, and at the call, in some cases, of the people of Australia. I am afraid that they have not received that consideration, perhaps even from the Federal Government, which they were promised when they left our shores, and although I quite agree with the Prime Minister's amendment as facilitating the getting of the information required, I would direct his attention to this fact, that as the Federal Government has taken over very considerable departments from the States, it has its share of responsibility in seeing that what can be properly done for those men who have given their services to Australia is done by the Federal Government when the occasion justifies it.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

PAPER

Mr. BARTON laid on the table, by command -

Despatch from His Excellency Rear-Admiral Beaumont to His Excellency the Governor-General, in response to a despatch from the Governor-General, dated 14th June, 1901, inviting him, at the instance of the Ministry, to assist in instituting a system of naval defence for the Commonwealth of Australia.

ADJOURNMENT

Railway Passes to Members : Telegraphic Communication to Tarcoola

Motion (by Mr. Barton) proposed -

That this House do now adjourn.

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Mr V L SOLOMON

- I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether any arrangement has yet been come to with the Railway departments of the different States with reference to the charges for members of the Federal Parliament travelling over the railway lines.

Mr Barton

- The matter is still in the hands of the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Railways Commissioners in the several States.

Mr. POYNTON (South Australia). Before any decision is come to in the matter, I would like to know whether the House will have an opportunity of seeing what the proposals are. In the meantime, I would like to know what is our position - are we travelling now at our own risk ?

Minister (without portfolio)

Sir PHILIP FYSH

- I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to give an answer to a question asked by the honorable member for South Australia, Sir Langdon Bonython, when, unfortunately, I was not in my place. The question was whether any decision had been arrived at with reference to the extension of telegraphic communication to Tarcoola, the new gold-field in South Australia, as asked for by a recent deputation. I have to answer that the report of the Deputy Postmaster-General, of South Australia, is to the effect that there are at present about 350 or 400 men on the ground, and the reports from the locality show that, although the prospects are favorable, the mines are as yet only in an early stage of development. There are three routes by which telegraphic communication could be established - namely, from Port Augusta, at an estimated cost of £14,000; from Coward Springs, at an estimated cost of £9,000 ; and from Streaky or Murat Bay, at an estimated cost of £8,000. In view of all the circumstances, it is considered that the extension of telegraphic communication to Tarcoola should be postponed until the mines have been more fully developed. Ministers watch with interest the development of the mines in that district, with a hope that they may early be warranted in reconsidering the proposal. So soon as development warrants the extension of telegraphic communication, the Government will be very glad to promise it.

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

. - In reply to the very interesting question addressed to me by the honorable member for South Australia, Mr. Poynton, I have to say that when matters are brought to the point of settlement there will be no delay in giving the House the necessary information. In the meantime, it has been thought desirable that as far

as possible there should be some record or tally kept of the journeys undertaken by honorable members. That record affords some check which will enable the Government to know in the eventual settlement of the matter, whether the terms proposed are reasonable or not. In the meantime, the journeys are being debited to the Commonwealth. Honorable members have their railway passes, but that does not mean that the passes are free to any persons but themselves.

Mr V L SOLOMON

- Are the passes free to wives of honorable members?

Mr BARTON

- In the cases, which are not numerous, where the wives of honorable members have travelled, a similar record has been kept with a view of seeing what would be a fair sum in the event of the Government having to settle on that basis. What we want to get is something that will be a guide to us in the future, in order that we may see we are dealt with fairly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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15:20:00

House adjourned at 3.20 p.m.