

INTERNATIONAL MARITIME COMMITTEE.

ANTWERP, 8th June, 1913.

30, Rue des Escrimeurs.

DEAR SIR,

The Agenda-paper of the Copenhagen Conference included the following matters:

- 1) International Code of Freight;
- 2) The London Declaration relating to the law of Maritime Warfare;
- 3) Safety in Navigation;
- 4) The question of insurance on enemy goods.

The Conference has been a complete success, and the matters on the Agenda-paper were fully discussed. A short report on the labours of the Conference will be issued shortly and the full verbatim report is to follow soon afterwards.

We think we may summarize as follows the conclusions arrived at by the Conference:

I.—International Code on Freight.—The draft-treaty prepared by the London Sub-Committee (1911) was adopted for the purpose of a first reading, and the Conference appointed a Commission with a view to preparing for the next conference a definite code, taking due account of the discussions and resolutions of the Paris and Copenhagen Conferences, as well as of the remarks made by the various national associations.

The question of the through-bill-of-lading has been the subject of highly interesting debates, as well as that of the *Time-charter*. The questions are new ones and they deserve our best attention, considering that there do not yet exist any legal provisions as to these matters.

II.—London Declaration.—The International Maritime Committee examined the question of the ratification of the London Declaration, at the request of the Interparliamentary Union. The following conclusions, stated on behalf of the Permanent Bureau, summarize the work of the Conference on this most important subject.

The permanent Bureau considered the advisability of allowing a formal motion, giving expression to the views which have been exposed on Tuesday last before this meeting, to be brought before the Conference. Considering, however, that the London Declaration is a diplomatic instrument already agreed to by the Powers and already signed, the Bureau is of opinion that as a matter of form, courtesy and discretion, it should not be the subject of a formal vote by a Conference which, however representative, has no official capacity. But the Bureau wishes to place on record the very satisfactory result of the debate which took place here on Tuesday afternoon:—In the first place, it was the unanimous expression of views heard here that the London Declaration embodies a great progress in maritime public Law; it brings certainty where there was uncertainty, and agreement where there was controversy. On that account, if ratified, it will not only be a great benefit to the commerce of the world, but also both to neutrals and to belligerent States.

Secondly it was pointed out that, even if some very important questions are left out of the scope of the Declaration, consideration of these is by no means prejudiced by what is said in the Declaration. On the contrary, the effect of the absence of a formal ratification would most probably be to render more difficult complementary agreements and useful amendments.

A most interesting debate took place at the Conference on articles 33 and 34 which relate to bases of operation, of supply, &c. It was very gratifying to the Permanent Bureau that the construction which was put upon these articles both by Earl Beauchamp in the House of Lords and by the German plenipotentiaries at the London Conference, did not raise any contradiction in this great assembly.

Under these circumstances, the Permanent Bureau considers it as the unanimous opinion of the Conference that it is highly advisable that the Declaration should be ratified.

III.—Safety in Navigation.—A series of highly interesting reports were sent in by the various national Associations and Committees, in view of the Copenhagen Conference. After thorough discussions, the Conference adopted the following resolutions:

“1. Considering that unceasing progress in shipbuilding is essential to safety in navigation; that very considerable services have been rendered, in this matter by the classification and Registration Societies; that any regulation liable to impair, or incompatible with, the progress of shipbuilding would do more harm than good;

“This Conference is of opinion that an international agreement relating to the Safety of life at sea might usefully deal with general rules in regard to wireless telegraphy, bulkheads, life-boats and life-saving apparatus and deck-loads.

“2. With the object of collecting and filing information in regard to Safety of Navigation, of securing the communication and exchange of such information, of facilitating reciprocity and uniformity in national laws and regulations, of preparing reforms and amendments to national laws and to promote the uniformity of their administration, the Conference considers that the establishment of a permanent international office, of a technical and consultative character, is highly desirable.”

With these views you will probably be in agreement. If we wish to succeed in this difficult matter, it is of great importance that, at least at first, the work of international regulation should only include such matters as it may efficiently deal with and should not endanger the progress of shipbuilding or trespass upon the sovereignty of the contracting States.

The creation of an international Permanent Bureau would greatly increase the practical character and the usefulness of an international agreement on this subject.

IV.—Insurances on Enemy Goods.—After an interesting debate, it was recognized by all, that the provisions tending to pronounce void insurances on enemy goods, are obsolete and are not applicable to modern commercial relationships.

The Conference heard with the greatest satisfaction a declaration of Sir Edward Beauchamp, Bart., President of Lloyd's Committee, stating officially on behalf of that Committee: 1) that neither the underwriting of policies nor the settlement of claims on behalf of enemy subjects are regarded under English Law, as legal offences, 2) that the English Underwriters have assumed, and have expressed the intention of continuing to hold the intention, to faithfully carry out, in time of war as in time of peace, all such policies underwritten by them, as well on behalf of enemies as of neutrals or of their fellow subjects. This important statement, publicly made on behalf of the most important institution of marine insurance of the world, will no doubt remove the apprehensions of Commerce and facilitate in a large measure an international agreement on this matter.

The Permanent Bureau has been requested to prepare a draft for that purpose.

We may add that His Majesty Christian X received a delegation of the Conference, and in his address to this delegation congratulated our Association on its labors and on the considerable result already achieved.

We are, Dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

THE PERMANENT BUREAU:

The President,

CHARLES LE JEUNE.

The Hon. General Secretaries,

LÉON HENNEBICQ,
LESLIE SCOTT.

The Vice-President,

LOUIS FRANCK.

The Secretary,

FRÉDÉRIC SOIR.