

The terms of reference were as follows: "That a Select Committee be appointed to consider the Radio-telegraphic Convention, signed at Berlin on the 3rd day of November, 1906, and to report what, from the point of view of national and public interests, would, in their opinion, be the effect of the adhesion or non-adhesion of this country to the Convention."

Among the witnesses whose evidence the Committee have taken were several of the delegates appointed by Great Britain to attend the Berlin Conferences of 1903 and 1906, referred to later; Government representatives of the Admiralty, War Office, Post Office, and Colonial Office; a witness from Lloyd's and one from a steamship company, representing the shipping interests; scientific and other witnesses to explain various systems of radio-telegraphy other than that known as the Marconi system; representatives of the Marconi companies, and Mr. Marconi himself. Although the Committee had not the advantage of hearing evidence from any member of the Committee of Defence, they have been assured on the highest authority that there was no difference of opinion among the members of that Committee as to the satisfactory nature of the Convention from the point of view of the interests of the country.

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GENERAL OBSERVATION.

There appear to be three alternatives open to Great Britain—ratification, rejection, postponement. It may be convenient to dispose of the two latter first.

Rejection.

Rejection would seem to be the more obvious alternative to ratification. The only evidence in favour of rejection was that of Mr. Cuthbert Hall, general manager of the Marconi Company; of Professor Fleming, scientific adviser of the Marconi Company; of Mr. Henniker Heaton; and, with much less intensity, of Mr. Marconi. An examination of the statement of these witnesses shows that their arguments were based mainly on a consideration of the interests of the company.

Rejection would seem to the Committee to involve the following results:—

Injurious Effect of Non-ratification.

(a.) Great Britain took a prominent part in the Conference, and the Convention was modified in many important respects in order to meet her wishes and secure her adherence. If Great Britain now refuses to ratify, doubt will be thrown upon the sincerity of her expressed views at the Conference. The contrast between the attitude of the British Government at the time of the Conference, and its attitude in refusing to ratify, would be emphasized by the fact that the next Conference was invited to meet in London.

(b.) It would create a direct and powerful motive for the erection of stations on foreign territory; and such stations will be in no way subject to British control in time of war or emergency.

(c.) Foreign ships and coast stations would seriously interfere with British stations. Such interference would arise from the normal operations of ships in the Channel and elsewhere communicating with distant stations on foreign coasts. Not only would other nations be forced to erect additional shore stations, but these stations and the ship stations as well would be obliged to use additional energy. This natural interference might probably be increased by intentional action, and, without the Convention, British stations would have no remedy.

(d.) In the absence of international arrangements and rules for working, accounts, collection of charges, &c., the development of the service would be seriously embarrassed.

(e.) The drawbacks indicated in the three previous heads would be specially detrimental to Great Britain, owing to the predominance of her maritime interests and her geographical position.

(f.) Under the terms of the Convention, the nations adhering are bound to refuse to license, on board a ship or at shore stations, the apparatus of any system which declines to accept the principle of intercommunication. If Great Britain, therefore, refuses to ratify, the Marconi apparatus at present installed at foreign shore or ship stations will be removed, and its place will be taken by some system that accepts intercommunication.

Postponement.

No evidence was given to your Committee in favour of postponement as distinguished from non-ratification. It may be pointed out that postponement would in no way diminish any of the unfortunate results which would follow on rejection, while it would be attended by the grave additional result that the action of Great Britain might be open to much misconstruction in regard to the position she took up at the Conference, through which important concessions were obtained by her delegates.

Further, it would prolong a period of uncertainty, without securing any conditions by which the future would be determined. No evidence has been brought before the Committee to show that within any specified time the scientific aspects of the question will undergo any substantial alteration of a kind which, in the Committee's opinion, is not already amply provided for and protected by the various provisions of the Convention.

Moreover, the Convention would, it is assumed, be brought into operation without reference to Great Britain. Great Britain having such a predominant interest in the question, ought to be in a position to make her influence felt from the start, in interpreting, administering, and enforcing the terms of the Convention.

The fact that by twelve months' notice Great Britain can at any time withdraw from the Convention if it is found that British interests are in any way jeopardized, appears to secure all necessary liberty of action, especially during the experimental period.