

[Mr. Thomas.]

I also want to ask the right hon. Gentleman what is the position at the moment with regard to the labour conditions in the Gold Coast mines. When I saw a return, I was not only staggered, but I believe there could be no Member in this House other than shocked to find the number of people that were daily going to a living death. The figures for the Gold Coast were terrible. It is quite true that they were natives, but that is not an argument against something being done. I felt that there was a moral responsibility, and the result was that I stopped the recruiting. I said, "There are to be no more of these natives going down under these conditions," and I sent a special Commissioner to investigate the whole situation, and a rather alarming report he gave. It was a deplorable report, a report that was a disgrace, and I want to know what is the position at this moment. What is the change? Is the same system in operation? What effect is being given to the Report, and are steps being taken to get periodical visits of this kind? I am convinced, from the figures and the extraordinary state of affairs then existing, that, instead of waiting till someone's attention is drawn to this terrible mortality—

The UNDER-SECRETARY of STATE for COLONIAL AFFAIRS (Mr. Ormsby-Gore): If the right hon. Gentleman cares for the figures, I have them in my head. I visited the mines myself, and there has been a most remarkable improvement. Last year, instead of a high mortality, the figures for 13,000 labourers in the five mining concerns were only 11 deaths from accidents, and the total mortality from all disease, including old age, was only 144.

Mr. THOMAS: That is a remarkable improvement and only emphasises the point I am making. That change would not have happened. It might have gone on year after year. The very fact that it was necessary to take drastic action, and then prove the action was justified by the improvements made, emphasises, I think, the point I am making, that, instead of waiting in this matter to see the facts dragged out, some steps ought to be taken to see that visiting of some kind is done in order to prevent it. Not only am I delighted to know of the improvements, but I hope, and I am sure, that, the facts

having now been brought out, the right hon. Gentleman and the Under-Secretary will see that, where there is any repetition in any part in connection with matters of this kind, he will take as prompt and drastic action as I did to stop it. I therefore propose leaving the African question to a number of my friends who will follow me, and I will content myself with saying that I hope the next Imperial Conference will be fruitful and beneficial and will tackle these great and difficult and technical problems not in a party spirit. The suggestion I made is not made because we want the Opposition there or anything of that sort. It is merely because we want to make it more representative of the Empire as a whole and not cause disappointment to those who come and those whom they represent because of a reversal of policy due to circumstances for which no one is responsible.

Viscount SANDON: Having myself been at the Colonial Office at a particularly interesting and important period of the history of the Empire, and having seen a certain amount of the Dominions and Colonies, there are one or two points I should like to raise on this important question. The emptiness of the Liberal benches bears out all that is said about the remarkable interest in the Empire that has always been associated with that body. There is one point that does need consideration by His Majesty's Government and something that should be considered when the Imperial Conference meets, and that is as regards foreign policy. In this matter we have drifted ever since the good days—from that point of view—of the War. Although we have a terror of the word "machinery" I do hope the possibilities of doing something will be investigated. At the present moment existing machinery has not, I believe, been carried out as fully as it might have been. I believe it was agreed that High Commissioners should attend the meetings of the Cabinet when matters of external interest—foreign, Imperial, or otherwise—were under discussion. Can the Secretary of State say how often, in fact, the High Commissioners have been invited to attend meetings of the Cabinet when matters of this sort have been under discussion? It is not the ideal way, it is a poor way; but it should be taken advantage of as something that

is ready to hand. In the last few years since the War we have acted on the basis—and it has been put forward by so good an Imperialist as the present Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs—of "keeping the Dominions informed." It does not seem to me that we shall get over our difficulties by methods of that sort. The Dominions should have greater initiative than being merely kept informed. The matter came to a head at the time of the Lausanne Treaty and endless complications were patched up in the way in which Imperial difficulties always are patched up after a certain amount of wrangling. The same system prevailed with the Protocol and Locarno Pact. The Dominions should be vitally concerned in these decisions and should take a share in them.

The Australian Government have taken a step in this direction by setting up a Secretariat, and I think it might be considered by the other Governments whether it would serve their interests. I think they could develop that line by having a Minister to come over, officially, periodically. It would be valuable not only to themselves but also to our Foreign Office in this country. The Dominions quite rightly and naturally feel that their High Commissioners, who are detached from their own countries for a long time, cannot be considered representative of, and capable of interpreting, their own countries. It is an important question, because we saw, both at the time of the Protocol and the Pact, the difficulty of the Dominions. Though no doubt they took quite a right line from the point of view of the Empire, they could not realise, nor should they be expected to realise, the domestic questions that concern ourselves. By an unfortunate curse of fate, we are in Europe, and we must put up with being involved in European affairs. I am perfectly certain that if the Dominions took a share in framing our foreign policy, they would realise how important a concern European affairs are for us. I do not think it is a matter for us to raise on our own responsibility whether the Dominions cannot be brought in so that they can understand our point of view in domestic matters of this sort, which are life and death to us, and which are really bound to open up and extend more and more. This might well

be done by encouraging the people of our Dominions to enter the Diplomatic Service and the service of the Foreign Office. It is advantageous to get fresh ideas in. One of the curses of Civil Service administration in this country, though it is probably the finest in the world, is that it does tend to be narrowed too much to type. It would be admirable if we had Canadians and Australians and others from our Dominions in the Legations and Embassies. It would be a splendid thing to have a Canadian, Australian or someone from one of our other Dominions as an Ambassador, and, preferably, in some place where their own interests were not great, so as to exemplify to the world Empire solidarity.

Captain CROOKSHANK: Is the hon. Member aware that the Diplomatic Service is open to anyone in the British Empire, and that at the present time there are several Dominion members in it?

Viscount SANDON: I quite realise that it is open to anyone who wishes to go into it, but what I meant to say was that special facilities should be given by the Government in collaboration with the Dominions Governments. A thing that wants emphasizing is that we should make it quite clear, by definite statements, that if the Canadian Government wanted at any time to revise the British North American Act there could be no objection from this country to their doing so. That may seem superfluous, but if you study the debates in the "Empire Parliamentary Association Journal" you will find that these ideas are being constantly raised and their denial makes no difference to the number of times that they are brought up. The same applies to the Privy Council appeal, although there they have to clear up the position with their own provinces. You see this talk of a limited independence in the debates of several of the Dominions. There is nothing in it, because the Dominions know that they can go out of the Empire to-morrow if they like. They often complain in our dictating Foreign Policy, but they know that it is quite open to them to take a share in the foreign policy of this country if they wish to do so and have the energy and initiative, and that is their own fault. During the heat and passion of what has