

055966

Citizen

Ottawa, Canada.
Thursday, July 17, 1924.

EDITORIAL.

Dominions at Inter-Allied Conference.

Premier Ramsay MacDonald is to be congratulated upon having decided to include Dominion representatives on the British delegation to the Inter-Allied Conference which is at present meeting in London. The lateness of the decision, made apparently at the eleventh hour, is an indication that some stiff opposition had to be overcome before the Dominions could be conceded the right to representation.

In accordance with the resolution at the Imperial Conference in London last year, the British premier seemed bound to invite the dominions to send representatives. There is no doubt, as he stated in the House of Commons at Westminster last month, the premier desired to have the dominions associated with Great Britain as partners in everything that might be discussed at the Inter-Allied Conference. But he came very near finding himself in the same position as Lord Curzon in negotiating the Lausanne Treaty, which the parliament of Canada has since declined to ratify.

When the British premier announced in the House of Commons, last June 23, that an Inter-Allied Conference would be called, the former under-secretary for foreign affairs, Ronald McNeill, asked whether, in view of the recent correspondence with Canada over the Lausanne Treaty, the dominions would be asked to participate in the Inter-Allied Conference. According to the Canadian Press report, Premier MacDonald, after consulting with J. H. Thomas, colonial secretary, said:

As a matter of fact we are in communication with the dominions now. I think perhaps I had better give you assurance that, without committing myself to details of what is to be done, the dominions will be completely consulted so that they may feel they are partners with us in everything we do.

When this news item appeared in Canadian newspapers next day, one of the Alberta members, Henry E. Spencer, asked the government if any communication had been received "with reference to the Inter-Allied Conference to be called in London during July to give effect to the Dawes report." Premier Mackenzie King replied that he had no doubt a communication would be received in due course; but, he said:

Up to the present time, however, the government has received no communication from the British government with reference to this conference.

Later replies recorded in Hansard would show that the Canadian government received no invitation to send a delegation to the conference.

The government did receive a request to have a representative at a preliminary conference, to consider the matter of representation at the Inter-Allied Conference. Premier Mackenzie King stated in answer to a question on July 9 that the Canadian high commissioner, Mr. Larkin, had been asked to represent the government at that preliminary conference. At the meeting between Premier MacDonald and the dominion high commissioner in London on July 11, the British premier "advanced a number of objections to direct participation by the various dominions in the coming conference and urged that such participation would be deemed by other countries as unduly favoring the British element in the conference."

As in the case of the Lausanne Conference there is reason to believe that the opposition to Dominion representation came mainly from France. The difficulty has been overcome by adopting what is called the panel system under which, as at the Versailles Conference, one of the British delegates will be a dominion representative. This arrangement meets the requirements of Canada at the present conference. Premier King should have the support of Canadian public opinion in the firm stand he has taken to maintain the status which Canada and the other dominions attained under Sir Robert Borden's leadership at the end of the war.

As it is impossible for any Dominion cabinet minister to be in London in time for the conference, the government's arrangement to appoint Senator Belcourt as Canadian delegate would seem to be the best expedient under the circumstances. He is a privy councillor and a former Speaker of the House of Commons. As a French-speaking representative of Canada he should be welcomed by the French delegation at the Inter-Allied Conference.

But it must be said that the last minute decision on the part of the British premier to admit dominion representation is hardly the most inspiring method of making sure that all the members of the British Commonwealth of nations are partners with Great Britain on such momentous occasions. It tends to convey the impression to many observant Canadian people that dominion interests in the development of British policy are liable to be overlooked by the administration at Whitehall unless the dominion premiers insist upon representation, as Premier Mackenzie King has evidently done in the present instance.

106

MEINREN PAPERS, Series B (C.C. 26, I, Volume 10)

PUBLIC ARCHIVES
ARCHIVES PUBLIQUES
CANADA