

CONSERVATIVE LEADER COMMONWEALTH CLUB

**Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen Tells
Winnipeg Members Indefin-
able Empire Relations Best**

**Deprecates Putting in Black
and White Exact Conditions
—Canadians Take Middle**

Declaring that there are extremists who seem to favor everything that tends to a complete autonomy which amounts to independence or separation from the Mother Country, and others who are raging, rampant imperialists, while the great bulk of the Canadian people take the middle ground, Right Hon. Arthur Meighen, leader of the Dominion Conservative party, addressed the Winnipeg Commonwealth club on the subject of "Empire Relations" at a banquet in the Royal Alexandra last night.

Mr. Meighen claimed that the indefinable relations which in the past had made for the strength of the British empire should be allowed to continue, and argued that though direct representation in the peace conference and the League of Nations had been obtained by the Dominion,

these occasions were in a distinct category, and that for general international treaty-making purposes Canada, and the other dominions should be content with representation on the British panel, leaving direct negotiations with the British authorities.

The Conservative leader, who was cordially received by the club, which is a non-partisan organization, deprecated holding any constitutional conference "whose majestic object would be to re-write and put in black and white what the exact relations of the empire are." In that he apprehended great danger, and he maintained it would be much safer to let the relations developing along the lines that had made the British empire what it is today, the most potent factor that exists for the betterment of mankind.

Share Burdens

Mr. Meighen emphasized the point that the relations must not only be kept intact but that there should be a greater measure of co-operation on the part of the dominions in sharing the burdens of empire, and in this connection he suggested that more should be done in meeting the cost of defence and fortification.

Edward Anderson, K.C., presided. Premier John Bracken was among those present. Mr. Anderson, in explaining the aims and objects of the Commonwealth club, said it was originally an insurance organization, but had developed into a patriotic club to develop closer relations between Canada and the other parts of the British empire. It was endeavoring to preserve the British connection between Canada and the other dominions. Changes had taken place in the relations of the self-governing nations of the empire, and

it was hard to say what the relations might be, but the club wanted to know what was going on and it wanted to have its say in determining what those relations should be. It was a non-partisan, non-political club, and was not political in the ordinary sense of the word. It was the intention to ask gentlemen of different views on this question to address the club, hence the invitation to Mr. Meighen.

Premier to Be Heard Later

An invitation, Mr. Anderson explained, had been sent to Premier Mackenzie King, but Mr. King had replied that the short programme already arranged for his western visit precluded the possibility of additional meetings. The club was hopeful, said Mr. Anderson, that Mr. King would manage to address the club at some future time.

Mr. Meighen stated that the advance of a family of nations had been from the small to the large. The unit had been growing from the dawn of time. Some 2,000 years ago there was the Roman empire, which had prosecuted its expansion wholly without regard to the rights of others. The British empire had developed to a magnitude vaster far than that of the Roman empire, and its progress had been marked by reasonable concern for the rights of other people, while its penetration, even in the far-off days, had been a penetration dictated not only by self-interest but in the main by a real desire to help the people among whom the British went. As the law of the unit expands all the time, it seemed to follow that anything in the way of disintegration or weakening of that unit was a step backward for the human race. Consequently they as members of the empire were of the mind that though the strain at times may be very hard, though the obligations may be perplexing, though opinions may sharply collide, they must strive to maintain the empire intact and ennoble its purposes in the world.

There were extremists, this speaker said, who seemed to favor everything that tended to a complete autonomy that meant independence or separation, while there were other extremists who were raging, rampant imperialists, sometimes he was put in that class, but he was free to confess that the great mass of the people of Canada occupied the middle ground. It was this middle ground that he intended to explore now.

Local Self-Government

Mr. Meighen declared that the British Empire was the first of the units which had sought to grow upon the principle of local self-government or autonomy. Naturally, the expansion of the British Empire on this principle had been a matter of gradual development. Canada, the pioneer Dominion, exemplified from its growth the soundness of this principle. He explained the various stages of this development and the apprehension of some people in the Mother Land as to the compatibility of this expansion with the diplomatic unity of the Empire. But as time went on and each succeeding experiment in self-government was successful, there came a more liberal mind on the part of the authority overseas, and less difficult became any struggle in connection with the aspirations of the Dominion to control its own affairs, until treaties in which Canada alone was interested were concluded by Dominion representatives, with the British ambassador occupying a more or less formal and purely diplomatic sphere. Responsible statesmen of all parties in Great Britain were inclined to give the dominions what they wanted in the way of self-control of their own affairs, and the dominions on their part wanted to make their contribution to the progress of the Empire.

Canada's Autonomy

That was the relation that ought to exist, said Mr. Meighen. That was the attitude of mind that was proper. There were some who thought that in respect of the demand for complete autonomy Canada had gone too far in regard to matters of Empire policy. Canada had a certain method of stating its case and presenting its views in respect of matters of major concern affecting the relations of the Empire with other countries. It was an inadequate method, he admitted frankly. It would take years to perfect it, and it would be a matter of evolution and growth. In exercising that right Canada had gone to great lengths in certain very important cases. Mr. Meighen showed how it had been exercised in connection with the treaty of peace and the League of Nations, but he pointed out there were very special reasons why Canada could lay claim to such direct representation. It must always be remembered, however, said Mr.

Meighen, that these two occasions were in a category by themselves.

At Reparations Convention

"In the matter of the recent reparations convention," continued Mr. Meighen, "the British government, in deference to the other powers taking part in the negotiations, yielded to the view that it would be impossible to give distinct and separate representation to the Dominions, and that all the Dominions could justly claim was representation on the panel

of empire representatives conferring day by day. The Canadian government acquiesced in that concession, and when the Canadian government announced its acquiescence, it was very pleased indeed to agree with its stand. It seems to me that in negotiations of that kind, it is better for the empire, and better for ourselves, that the Dominions should be represented on the panel. In that way their policy can be expressed, and in that way the British policy

can be kept as one before the rest of the world. In that way there can be merged and welded together the different viewpoints of the various portions of the British empire.

Cornerstone of Structure

"I emphasize with as much fervor as any Canadian the essential character of that autonomy which I have traced. There can be no subtraction from the degree we have reached,

and I don't believe there can be any addition which we can completely express and which the representatives of the Canadian people desire we should have, that will be seriously denied by the British government. I believe that history has proved that the British people accept that principle as the cornerstone of the whole imperial structure. I am not one who believes in that as the only cornerstone, and that on that alone can

the greatest usefulness of the empire be attained. Indeed, I don't believe that the British empire can permanently hold together unless co-equal with that principle of autonomy is kept in mind the necessity for the further cornerstone of mutual co-operation."

In this respect, Mr. Meighen claimed the Dominions should do more in the way of contributing toward the cost of imperial defence.

Mr. Meighen, in deprecating the holding of a constitutional conference, said that if one were held he would prefer some other than himself to represent Canada. It would be a difficult and dangerous matter to put in black and white the relations of the empire, and it was better to let them proceed along the lines on which they had moved, taking care of each contingency as it arose.

880 3