

But it was information, it was not consultation, as we understand those words. I might say to my hon. friend and to the house that at eight o'clock last evening, just before coming into the house, I received word in a dispatch that the British government were then considering issuing a statement to-day and that we would be advised of the statement as soon as it was ready to be issued. I received this morning word of the statement. It came in the form of the statement as actually made in the British House of Commons by the Prime Minister.

Mr. COLDWELL: Thank you.

Hon. C. H. CAHAN (St. Lawrence-St. George): Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to enter upon any lengthy discussion of the issues which have arisen in connection with this debate, because I thought that my own views had been so repeatedly expressed that it was now unnecessary. But certain issues have arisen which, I think, call for a restatement of those views. I regard this debate as one of the most momentous I have attended in recent years in the House of Commons, because here we are laying down for the guidance of the government—this government and future governments—the fundamental principles on which the commonwealth of nations is founded and in accordance with which there must be cooperative action between Canada, the United Kingdom and the sister dominions.

The British North America Act recites that Canada is a dominion under the crown of the United Kingdom. That is the fundamental basis upon which the Dominion of Canada is established. The oath of allegiance which had been administered in Canada until May 16, 1934, was as follows:

I, A.B., do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George V (or reigning sovereign for the time being) as lawful sovereign of the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, of the British possessions beyond the seas, and of this Dominion of Canada, dependent on and belonging to the said kingdom.

That last phrase did not seem to me to be consistent with the status of Canada as a member of the British commonwealth of nations. I therefore introduced in the session of 1934 a bill which was passed unanimously amending that oath of allegiance to read as follows:

I, A.B., do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to King George V, his heirs and successors according to the law.

The phrase of the former oath of allegiance, that "this Dominion of Canada belongs to

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

the United Kingdom," was left out because it seemed to me to be inconsistent with our present status. The crown under which Canada exists as a dominion, so far as we are concerned, seems to me undoubtedly to be now one and indivisible as it was when the British North America Act was first enacted in 1867. The crown is as indivisible as the person of the king is indivisible. When a state of war exists between the crown and any country whatever, then Canada is at war and cannot legally be neutral. That is my firm conviction. A declaration by the parliament of Canada of neutrality in any war in which the crown is involved is a declaration of Canada's repudiation of the crown and a declaration of Canada's secession from the British commonwealth and from the empire. A declaration of neutrality is not a declaration of a legal right but a political declaration of vast import to Canada and to the other dominions.

This Canadian parliament may, if it will, make such a declaration, but such a declaration if made will be a repudiation of our oaths of allegiance and a declaration of the severance of Canada's political association with the other British dominions. If and when such a declaration is attempted, its real import will certainly be brought home to the hearts and minds of the Canadian people, and no member of this parliament can have any doubt as to the verdict which the vast majority of the Canadian people will render thereon.

Canada has certain responsibilities to the crown, to the United Kingdom and to all other dominions under the crown, which responsibilities were in part expressed by a resolution of the imperial conference of 1923, which was approved by the government of Canada, which the government of Canada supported, and to which it subscribed at the time. That resolution contains the following:

1. The conference affirms that it is necessary to provide for the adequate defence of the territories and trade of the several countries comprising the British empire.

And then for the defence of the countries comprising the British empire the imperial conference of 1923 laid down the following as guiding principles:

(a) The primary responsibility of each portion of the empire represented at the conference for its own local defence.

(b) Adequate provision for safeguarding the maritime communications of the several parts of the empire and the routes and waterways along and through which their armed forces and trade pass.

(c) The provision of naval bases, and facilities for repair and fuel so as to ensure the mobility of the fleets.

(d) The desirability of the maintenance of a minimum standard of naval strength, namely, equality with the naval strength of any foreign power in accordance with the provisions of the Washington treaty on limitation of armaments as approved by Great Britain, all the self-governing dominions, and India.

Canada was represented at Washington in the negotiation of the Washington treaty, and that treaty was signed by an official representative of this dominion. Hon. members will note the various responsibilities: Adequate provision for safeguarding the maritime communications of the several parts of the empire; the safeguarding of routes and waterways along and through which armed forces and trade pass; the provision of naval bases and facilities for repair and fuel so as to ensure the mobility of the fleet; and the desirability of the maintenance of a minimum standard of naval strength in accordance with the provisions of the Washington treaty on limitation of armaments.

At the imperial conference of 1926 the resolutions of the conference of 1923, from which I have quoted, were affirmed by the following resolution:

1. The resolutions on defence adopted at the last session of the conference are reaffirmed.

That is a reaffirmation of the resolutions of the conference of 1923. The report of the imperial conference, which this parliament subsequently recognized as a charter of the liberties of the dominions, contained the oft-quoted declaration that the dominions are:

... autonomous communities within the British empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the crown, and freely associated as members of the British commonwealth of nations.

And that report of 1926 also declares:

Though every dominion is now, and must always remain, the sole judge of the nature and extent of its cooperation, no common cause will, in our opinion, be thereby imperilled.

That statement was made by Canada's representatives in conjunction with the representatives of all the other dominions who were assembled at the conference of 1926. Those resolutions and those declarations, in which Canada participated, imply not only the solidarity of the British empire but also the moral responsibility of each and every dominion to make every reasonable effort within its power and resources in order to maintain not only its own defences but also to cooperate with the other dominions in the defence of their common interests.

The declarations of successive imperial conferences, to which successive governments of Canada have been a party, necessitate our

due appreciation of the fact that many of these intricate questions of inter-imperial relationship have been left, as they have been left ever since the Dominion of Canada was formed, to the consideration of the governments and parliaments of the respective dominions and when particular events may arise demanding discussion and decision. I am of the opinion, which I have frequently expressed, that we shall best preserve the unity of the empire, shall best carry out the covenants implied in those declarations, by so dealing with events as they arise, and then by consultation, with goodwill, being ever anxious to conciliate and adopt as far as we may the views of the other sister dominions and of the United Kingdom, but ever persistently seeking to preserve the unity of the British empire of which we form a part, and upon which the well-being of this world for many years to come must largely depend.

In the meantime we must ever remember that the very existence of Canada as a political entity depends upon keeping inviolate not only our inter-imperial conventions but also the understandings and conventions embodied in our own constitution with respect to the rights and interests of certain racial and religious minorities, and with respect to the constitutional rights and interests of the several provinces of Canada. These understandings and conventions must be maintained in order that we may preserve the political entity as well as the political unity of our country. If we deliberately repudiate them, Canada will be disrupted and political chaos will undoubtedly ensue.

It is with these contingencies that we are now brought face to face. So far as I am concerned I believe that Canada is morally bound to fulfil her obligations and duties under those conventions, which were undoubtedly the fundamental compact upon which certain rights and liberties were vouchsafed to us by the conference of 1926 and by the statute of Westminster, in 1931, that carried these conventions and understandings into legal effect.

At the present time, believing as I do that my oath of allegiance to the crown, that my fulfilment of the duties and responsibilities which Canada has definitely undertaken, depend upon Canada cooperating with the other portions of the empire, not only in the defence of our own country but in the effective defence of our ports and harbours and the effective defence of the common interests which we all have as members of the British commonwealth, I cannot support any departure which implies that Canada is going to