

And after this come statements on behalf of Australia, New Zealand, The Cape and Natal.

The memorandum placed on record by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his colleagues declares for mutual Empire trade preferences, urges the Government of the United Kingdom to accept that principle, and reciprocate by granting preferential terms to the products of the Colonies; particularly presses for preferential treatment of the food products of Canada; and, in addition, as I have just noted, offers to consider further reductions of Canada's tariff in favour of Britain, upward revision of the tariff against foreign goods, and imposition of duties on foreign goods at the time admitted free.

I make two observations here. We have heard a good deal of criticism of what is called "bargaining" in tariffs. It would appear that Sir Wilfrid was not fearful about approaching the matter in that spirit. And it would also appear that Sir Wilfrid did not consider it improper to urge the Mother Country to modify her domestic tariff for the purpose of bringing into operation an Empire preference policy.

I now refer to the concluding paragraph of the memorandum. It is quite interesting. There are persons in public life in Canada who might go so far as to describe it as an ultimatum to the Mother Country. I will, however, speak of it as a warning. It says:

If after using every effort to bring about such a readjustment of the fiscal policy of the Empire, the Canadian Government should find that the principle of preferential trade is not acceptable to the Colonies generally, or to the Mother Country, then Canada should be free to take such action as might be deemed necessary in the presence of such conditions.

It will be observed before I have concluded that in substance there is striking similarity between what Sir Wilfrid Laurier asked for in 1902 and what Mr. Bennett asked for in 1930. Both urged acceptance of the principle of Empire mutual preferences; the details to be worked out later.

And now I want to take a moment or two to glance at our constitutional evolution.

When, in 1902, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was asked in Parliament to tell what he intended to do at the "Intercolonial Conference" that was to be held that summer, he very deferentially explained in these words:

We will first listen to the propositions made to us by the British authorities. I assume from the statements I have in hand that the Government of Great Britain has propositions to make to the Colonies upon this matter of commercial relations; for, if not, it would be worse than folly to ask us to discuss the matters.

Hon. Mr. TANNER.

That reveals the spirit of Colonial days. It is now nothing more than a memory. But although Sir Wilfrid displayed a deferential spirit, he was, as I have pointed out, moved to assert a distinctively Canadian spirit in the pronouncements he made to the Conference.

Came the Great War of 1914. Forthwith the Dominions in their spirituality and strength stood revealed before an astonished world. Momentous events followed. They gave startling impulse to the slumbering constitutional questions. The time was arriving for positive movement forward in the matter. That great Canadian and Empire statesman, Sir Robert Borden, was quick to read the signs of the times. He led the way.

There followed during a period of years conferences of statesmen of the Empire, including Mr. King when he was Prime Minister of Canada. Colonial status with its ancient procedures, precedents, dogmas and limitations was brushed aside. The book of the constitution of the Empire was rewritten. The Dominions took their places as nations of equality of status with the Mother Country and one another in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

When therefore, in 1930, the Prime Ministers of the Dominions assembled in London for conference they represented nations, not colonies. They embodied equality of authority and responsibility, and were charged with duty of speech and action in matters which related to the common interest and advantage of the Commonwealth. It was not an "Intercolonial Conference." It was a conference of free nations of equal standing with one another, met to consider matters that any or all of the nations might deem to be of benefit to the whole.

I think it is surprising that a public man who played a part in bringing about these changes and ushering in the new constitutional era should be heard saying that Prime Minister Bennett took too much on himself and roughly swept aside methods of procedure at Imperial Conferences when he submitted Canada's views in regard to preferential trade to the Conference of 1930. One might almost think that he expected Mr. Bennett to posture as a deferential Colonial; to wait in that spirit for some mythical "authorities" to speak; and, if such "authorities" had nothing to submit, to pack his trunks and return to Canada. And this would apply to the Prime Ministers of all the Dominions.

Critical persons have said that the Conference failed. I disagree with that. We see now that it did good work.