

Their position and mutual relations may be readily defined. They 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. . . .

It is not sufficient to stop there. That ended the declaration of position. There follows a statement of responsibility:

. . . though united by a common allegiance to the crown, and freely associated as members of the British commonwealth of nations.

What are the governing words of that section? "Freely associated"—not by force, not by coercion, but freely associated together. And free association means that in every action that is taken there is at least an understanding with the persons with whom you are associated.

Let us proceed a step further. It continues:

A foreigner endeavouring to understand the true character of the British Empire by the aid of this formula alone would be tempted to think that it was devised rather to make mutual interference impossible than to make mutual cooperation easy.

Such a criticism, however, completely ignores the historic situation. The rapid evolution of the oversea dominions during the last fifty years has involved many complicated adjustments of old political machinery to changing conditions. The tendency towards equality of status was both right and inevitable. Geographical and other conditions made this impossible of attainment by the way of federation. The only alternative was by the way of autonomy; and along this road it has been steadily sought. Every self-governing member of the empire is now the master of its destiny. In fact, if not always in form, it is subject to no compulsion whatever.

But no account, however accurate, of the negative relations in which Great Britain and the dominions stand to each other can do more than express a portion of the truth. The British Empire is not founded upon negations. It depends essentially, if not formally, on positive ideals. Free institutions are its life-blood. Free cooperation is its instrument. Peace, security, and progress are among its objects. Aspects of all these great themes have been discussed at the present conference; excellent results have been thereby obtained.

And mark these words:

And 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.

Equality of status, so far as Britain and the dominions are concerned, is thus the root principle governing our inter-imperial relations. But the principles of equality and similarity, appropriate to status, do not universally extend to function. Here we require something more than immutable dogmas. For example, to deal with questions of diplomacy and questions of defence, we require also flexible machinery—machinery which can, from time to time, be adapted to the changing circumstances of the world. This subject also has occupied our attention. The rest of this report will show

how we have endeavoured not only to state political theory, but to apply it to our common needs.

That declaration of 1926 was a declaration in which the present Prime Minister took his part. The right hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Lapointe) took his part in formulating it. In its ultimate expression and form it contemplates complete autonomy and freedom of action on the part of the dominions, subject to limitations, each of which is expressed so clearly that he who runs may read—"though united by a common allegiance to the crown," and "freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations"; (1) a common allegiance; (2) a free association. Association does not mean separation. It means unity of action and of purpose.

I recall the language used by the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Mackenzie) in making his statement to this house on March 24 last. What did he declare to be the security for Canadians on the high sea? He reviewed our foreign trade and referred to our position as an exporting country. Then he used these very impressive words, at page 1650:

"In regard to the exact position of Canada it is only fair to say that to-day the main deterrent against a major attack upon this country by a European power is the existence of the British fleet in north Atlantic waters."

He referred to that fleet again in these words:

Just as the British navy on the Atlantic is our greatest security in that quarter—

Then he went on to say that we might have some hope that our neighbouring friends would not desert us in time of peril. The British fleet! Who maintains it? Who is being taxed to death that it may live? From what quarter is it maintained? Yet, speaking for the government of this country in a moment of great peril and crisis, we are told that the British fleet is to protect us on the Atlantic. Sir, there you have the application of the declaration of 1926, "free association." Just as the minister pointed out that we would freely associate with others in maintaining our position, so he relies as of right, because of free association, upon the British fleet to protect our great trade and commerce to which he referred as being largely an export business sent from these shores. Have we not there, Mr. Speaker, the foreign policy, the external policy of Canada?

Then the Prime Minister put to this house five propositions, at least one of which I think must have been the creation of his own mind; for I have not heard anyone in this