

at the conferences of 1923 and 1926 so that the house may see how far they committed this country to anything which this parliament would be likely to take exception. At the imperial conference of 1923 a resolution was passed—and was reaffirmed in 1926—to the effect that, while it was for the parliaments of the different parts of the empire to decide the nature and extent of defence,

The primary responsibility of each portion of the empire was for its own local defence.

This was based upon a finding of the chiefs of staff subcommittee of the committee of imperial defence in 1923 as follows:

His Majesty's government in the United Kingdom is mainly responsible for the security of communications between the several parts of the commonwealth.

And:

Each of the several dominions is responsible for protecting its territory and coastal trade against aggression, until support comes from the outside.

Is there in that resolution anything to which hon. members would take exception? The imperial conference of 1926 laid down the following formula:

It was frankly recognized that in this sphere (i.e. foreign policy), as in the sphere of defence, the larger share of responsibility rests now, and must for some time rest, with His Majesty's government in Great Britain. Nevertheless all the dominions engage to some extent, and some to considerable extent, in the conduct of foreign relationships, particularly those with foreign countries on their borders. . . . the governing consideration underlying all discussions of this problem must be that neither Great Britain nor the dominions could be committed to the acceptance of active obligations, except with the definite assent of their own governments.

Can any exception be taken to these resolutions? I will guarantee that there shall be no resolution that will go further than either of these with respect to any demand on Canada at the forthcoming imperial conference.

Much has been said about a recent speech made by Sir Samuel Hoare. Does a speech made by a member of the parliament of the old country bind this parliament? It is a mighty fortunate thing for the old country that some of the speeches made here do not bind government there. That is equally true of all parliaments no matter where speeches happen to be made. Fortunately the British community of nations is one in which we are all free to say pretty much what we like, but none of us is bound by what the other fellow says. An imperial conference in London is no different from a dominion-provincial conference here in what it involves in the way of commitments by governments participating. We have had some speeches by members

of this parliament, in relation to what might take place at a dominion conference, which have not altogether pleased some of the provincial governments and provincial premiers. But they have not found themselves in any way bound by what was said. They have taken exception to what was said if they wished so to do, and they have acquiesced if they so wished. That is exactly the position this government will be in when it meets with other governments at the forthcoming imperial conference. However, it is quite clear that the concern and doubts of some hon. members have reached the ears of members of the government in the old country and that its members have seen there were those in this parliament who fear that in some way Canada is being committed at the present time with respect to what is being done for purposes of defence in Great Britain, or may be committed later on. Ministers of the crown have lost no time in making very clear that, as far as the defence of the different countries of the British Empire is concerned, it is for each part of the empire to decide for itself what it is going to do.

The first of these ministerial statements is one made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain. It leaves no room for doubt. Mr. Chamberlain, speaking in the British house of Commons on February 17, after referring to the fact that the United Kingdom was dependent for supplies upon overseas countries, which laid an especial responsibility upon the British forces, especially the navy, to preserve freedom of communications, said:

It is perfectly true we are dependent largely for supplies of essential materials upon the dominions and in that sense therefore the dispersal of the dominions over the world does lay this special duty upon the navy.

As far as the dominions are concerned it is not the intention to call upon the dominions to make any contributions to a common fund. The dominions as a matter of fact have spent a great deal of money upon perfecting or improving their own defences and that is their contribution to the common fund but there is no other form of contribution of which I am aware under discussion at the present time.

Even that statement was too much for the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. MacInnis). Speaking yesterday in the house he quoted this statement, and said: "So you see after all there is a common fund."

The hon. member quoted Mr. Chamberlain's statement:

So far as the dominions are concerned, it is not the intention to call upon the dominions to make any contribution to a common fund. The dominions, as a matter of fact, have spent a great deal of money—