

ception have been immense. In 1867, Canada became, by the British North America Act, the first self-governing Dominion; Australia achieved Dominion status in 1901, New Zealand in 1907, and South Africa in 1909. The emergence of the British Commonwealth, as distinct from the British Empire, may be said to have begun with the Colonial Conference of 1897 in London, which was restricted to representatives from the colonies possessing responsible government and Britain. The Colonial Conference of 1907 decided that, in future, these meetings would be called Imperial Conferences, to reflect the new status of the Dominions(5).

Major developments occurred during the period 1914-1939 as Canada and the other self-governing Dominions assumed more and more responsibility for their relations with other countries. After the First World War, Canada, supported on occasion by the other Dominions, succeeded in asserting its independence from the Imperial power by a series of agreements and precedents that in turn became the basis for further political developments. Beginning with Versailles in 1919, the Dominions successfully asserted their claim to separate representation at international conferences and then, in the 1920s, to diplomatic representation in foreign countries. This new relationship was set out in a communiqué from the Imperial Conference of 1926. Drawing upon the recommendations of the *Balfour Report*, the communiqué defined Britain and the Dominions as "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". The Statute of Westminster of 1931 gave legal effect to the substance of the decisions reached in 1926, and established the legislative equality of the Dominion parliaments with the British Parliament.

The decision of the Imperial Conference of 1926 also gave rise to another significant development in the character of relations between the Dominions. Even before the First World War, the Dominions had maintained high commissioners in London to deal directly with the British authorities(6). When the 1926 Conference decided that the governor-general in each of the Dominions should no longer be the representative of the British Government but rather of the Monarch, the British Government appointed high commissioners to the Dominions. High commissioners gradually assumed a diplomatic identity and functioned as the usual channel of communication between the Dominion and British governments; eventually, the Dominions exchanged high commissioners among themselves. A significant aspect of the high commissioner's function, which differentiates it from that of an ambassador, is that high commissioners are accredited

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(5) Appendix E contains a list of conferences.

(6) Canada appointed the first high commissioner to London in 1880.