

Conference Embarrassments

THE London Times was one of the journals which occasionally called for a Conference of delegates from the Overseas Dominions to assist the British Government in managing Imperial affairs, or, perhaps one should say, to make amends for the alleged innumerable failures of the Asquith Government to manage affairs properly. Now that an Imperial Conference has been called, and its invited members are arriving in London, the Times writers are awakening to the fact that there is little or no real work for the Conference, and they find it expedient to follow the example of several ministers who have warned the Conference delegates against interference in the questions for the consideration of which a Conference was supposed to be necessary. The Times, we are informed in a recent Montreal Star cablegram, "puts the brake upon Imperial enthusiasts here (in England) and in Canada who are acting as though the approaching sittings of the Imperial War Cabinet were to discuss, much less to settle, proposals to reconstruct the constitution of the Empire, or to create an Imperial Parliament." "Sir Robert Borden and his colleagues," continues the London journal, "were summoned to London primarily for war purposes, to assist in the war strategy and tactics, war supplies, the financial and material effect of the war on other countries and the possibilities of its ending," and "it would be a calamity" if the work of the Conference "went beyond these limits." The picture of these Colonial visitors, Canadians and others, sitting down at a table in London to give instruction in "war strategy and tactics" to the British naval and military commanders is an amusing one. That the direction of the war should be left in the hands of a very small committee, not to exceed five persons, was the very corner-stone of the platform on which the Lloyd George Government was formed. That under such circumstances "war strategy and tactics," or anything else relating to the manner in which the war shall be prosecuted, are to be seriously submitted to a body composed of a score or more of civilians is an idea too ridiculous to be accepted by an intelligent public. It would be a real "calamity" if such a body were entrusted with the determination of such matters. We may be sure that nothing of the kind will occur. People who wanted the Conference, and now do not know what there is for it to do, may talk of such questions being dealt with, but it is safe to say that no such folly will be permitted by Mr. Lloyd George. On nearly all the questions upon which the members of the Conference might be supposed to have ideas, they are being warned against meddling. Lord Curzon in the House of Lords, Mr. Bonar Law in the House of Commons and now the Times, "speaking authoritatively for the Government," have deemed it necessary, before the members of the Conference have assembled in Downing Street, to serve notice on them that on the very things about which the Conference advocates have been talking most, silence must be observed when the meeting takes place.

In view of these warnings from the highest quarters the overseas delegates who have reached London will begin to wonder why they are there. Mr. Hughes, the Australian Premier, escapes the embarrassment by absenting himself. In the minds of most of the Conference advocates Mr. Hughes was the man above all others who was needed to set the Empire's affairs right. When he left England a few months ago, after delivering a number of able and eloquent speeches, his departure was so

mourned that a group of men who in ordinary times exhibit a fair amount of common sense signed and published a memorandum praying the Imperial Government to bring him back at once and make him one of the directors of the war. This was some months before the calling of the Conference, and of course nothing came of the amusing proposal. Mr. Hughes had political troubles at home which, however, were so far overcome that a little while ago definite announcement was made that he would be present at the Conference. Now comes a later announcement that he will not attend. In view of these warnings that the most important questions must not be touched Mr. Hughes will hardly regret his inability to be present.

Lord Balfour's Report

FULLER accounts of the report submitted to the Imperial Government by the committee of which Lord Balfour of Burleigh is chairman, on the subject of preferential trade, show that the committee fully appreciated the difficulties of the subject and made their report with some hesitation. Accompanying the resolutions adopted by the committee and sent to the Government was an explanatory letter, in which the committee said:

"The Dominions have not asked, and we do not understand them to ask, that duties should be imposed by the United Kingdom for the sake of granting a preference to their products. But we feel that, in the words of the resolutions we are forwarding to you, it will be necessary to take into early consideration, as one of the methods of achieving the objects indicated, the desirability of establishing a wider range of duties than exist at present. That subject we propose to consider later, and to submit a further report thereon at an early opportunity, as well as on the question how far the interests of the Dominions could be met by the granting of subsidies in lieu of tariff preferences."

The committee go on to say that it will be very necessary in dealing with the matter to guard the interests of the consumer and of labor — things much easier to write about than to effectively perform. To begin their report with a recommendation of preferential tariff, and to suggest a little later that perhaps the granting of subsidies may take the place of tariff preferences, cannot be regarded as giving a strong deliverance on the vexed question. When the committee manifest so much uncertainty as to what is best, we may be sure that their report will be received with much doubt by the public.

Three members of the committee dissented from the recommendations, but on different grounds. Sir Frederick Smith states that while he is in general sympathy with the resolutions he "feels very strongly that in view of the present international situation the moment is inopportune to bring forward a recommendation on the subject of Imperial preference, which may involve an alteration in our fiscal policy towards the Allies." Mr. John O'Neil and Mr. Richard Hazleton, in their dissenting memorandum, claim that Ireland should be treated as a separate unit and should be allowed "the same fiscal liberty which is at present enjoyed by the self-governing Dominions."

The question of Imperial Preference has in the past proved a thorny one for the public men of the United Kingdom and it is not likely that the path of the advocates of the change will be found smooth now.

A Topsy-Turvy World

WHAT a topsy-turvy world it is! There is hardly a quiet corner in it. One by one the nations not at first in the war are being drawn into it. Our American neighbors, who thought they could keep out, are on the edge of the whirlpool. Sleepy China is stirred and virtually at war. And now comes the startling news that there is revolution in Russia, that the Czar has abdicated, and that there is a democratic government at Petrograd. The Russian censorship has been so severe that very little news of Russian conditions has been allowed to reach the outer world. Hence the news that has just come is surprising to most people. That there had been a powerful German influence at the Russian Court was long known. Recent ministerial changes had led the public abroad to think that this had been suppressed and that the Czar's government had been brought into harmony with the Duma and the people. Evidently the remedies applied were inadequate for the disease. Now the people seem to be taking affairs into their own hands. The Czar, it would appear, appreciating at last the discontent among the people, has bowed to the storm and abandoned his throne.

The one comfort to be derived from this sudden change is that the object of the revolution appears to be a more vigorous prosecution of the war. If there is any remainder of German influence in Russia the new government are likely to deal severely with it. The soldiers and the people seem to be united in their desire to see that the fight against Germany shall be pressed forward to victory. For the moment the confusion and disorder arising from revolutionary proceedings may have a paralyzing effect on the Russian naval and military operations. But if the new order of things finds favor with the masses of the people, as apparently it does, this difficulty will soon be overcome and Russia, stronger and more united than before, will continue to play her great part in the world effort to destroy German militarism.

Bernstorff's Complaint

ACCORDING to reports from Berlin Count Bernstorff, who is now there, complains that his party were harshly treated by the officials at Halifax when the steamer on which he travelled was detained there. It is noticeable, however, that there is a lack of specific charge in his story. He thinks the ship was unduly delayed, but he can hardly expect to be regarded as the best authority as to the time required for the examination. The British naval officers, he says, were very courteous, but he complains of the Canadian officials, and particularly of those who were women. Since the British navy has not yet enlisted women, the part of the examination that required the service of women necessarily had to be performed by Canadian women officials. That these performed their duties very thoroughly is evident from Count Bernstorff's statement. Everywhere women who have subjected themselves to examination by customs officials are prone to believe that they are harshly treated; that they have to submit at all is a grievance in their minds. Hence it is not surprising that the women of the German party felt aggrieved by the examination at Halifax. But there is no reason to doubt that the women who were assigned to the examination work at Halifax received special instructions to perform their duty with every courtesy to the travellers consistent with the efficiency of the work in hand. It is evident that, not any discourtesy, but the thoroughness of the examination was what Count Bernstorff's party found uncomfortable.