

C 277185

Re: Equality of Status and right of Canada to declare war.

Debate on Imperial and Foreign Relations

Revised Hansard May 28, 1928.
page 3475.

Mr. Bennett:

"Equality of status, as discussed this afternoon and this evening is, I say, a misnomer, and the case of Egypt best indicates exactly what is meant by it, but let us apply another test. There can be no equality of status as between Canada and Great Britain until both communities have the right to declare war and make peace. That is the test imposed by great writers on international law, and it does seem that without having reference to those authorities it is quite a simple one. Can Canada declare war today against any nation in the world? The answer must be in the negative, and so long as we may not declare war we have no equality of status with Great Britain. But if Great Britain declares war against Egypt it follows, of course, that war is thereby declared against Canada, although we may not have been a party to any treaty made between those two countries. Our commerce would be the prize of any opposing fleet by which it might be captured; our cities might be bombarded and we might be driven from the world so far as commerce and trade are concerned. That, I think, is so obvious as not to require any observations on my part other than merely to state the fact. Under these circumstances I leave it to the judgment of this house, and indeed I have stated this to others than members of this house, including imperial ministers, whether it is not very wrong and very improper to use this high sounding term with all the implications which are involved, because I know it cannot but do harm. I agree with the Prime Minister that it is always desirable to be frank and open in these matters and to use words which will express one's meaning without any desire to place limitations upon them, but the words "equality of status" connote and denote a condition in this country which has not yet been reached, and a condition which may not be reached until we take a solemn step which I hope and believe we never will take and which I know we will not take in my lifetime, a step which will give Canada that right of sovereignty which it does not possess, that right to amend, and to make its constitution, which right we do not possess at the moment. All these changes must first be brought about, as well as changes with respect to our merchant shipping acts, with respect to the Colonial Laws Validity Acts and with respect to those innumerable statutes which have force and vigour in this Dominion, although the casual observer has no reason for believing that to be the case. These are facts which we must face, whether we like it or not, and the use of words to express a position which is not true in law and which is false in its very inception cannot do any good to these self-governing dominions."