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## THE ROUND TABLE INDIA AND THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE.

A Quarterly Review of the Politics of  
the British Empire—Republished  
Under the Above Heading

VI.  
[N defining their attitude to the resolution which was carried in the Viceroy's Legislative Council on the motion of the Honourable Mr. Mohammad Shafi, His Majesty's Government were careful to lay due emphasis on reservations that were constitutionally necessary. They preserved full liberty of judgment; they were not committed in principle or detail; they must be guided largely by what the other members of the Conference thought, but they would give the resolution most careful consideration. Now, inasmuch as there was no express need for the Imperial Government to indicate their attitude towards a motion that had not yet been debated or carried, this assurance not only amounted to going farther than they might normally have been expected to go, but has reasonably been understood in India as intended to convey a hope of the Imperial Government's support when the question comes before the Conference.

Lord Hardinge also expressed his own trust and confidence that India's claim would receive sympathetic consideration from the governments of the self-governing Dominions. It is notorious that on certain questions, chief of which is Asiatic immigration, the Dominion governments have in the past been unable wholly to see eye to eye with the Government of India. The merits of the controversy do not immediately concern us. What we have to note is that it has in fact had the result that Indians and the white communities in Canada, South Africa, and Australia have in the past regarded each other with unfriendly feelings. In the case of South Africa the visit of Mr. Gokhale and the mission of Sir Benjamin Robertson produced a better understanding and a settlement in which Indian opinion for the most part acquiesces. In the other cases less progress has been made, although the example of South Africa seems to show that existing differences of opinion are not really irreconcilable. But in the past fifteen months Dominion and Indian troops have fought side by side in various theatres of war, and evidence has accumulated that each have acquired not merely perception of the other's martial qualities, but a wholly new understanding and appreciation of the other's character. The trenches and the hospitals have thrown light on virtues that could not be seen against a merely industrial or commercial background. India's hope rests chiefly upon the belief that Canadians and Australians who have been through the fire of war with Gurkhas and Pathans at their side will in future look at Indian questions in a new and more liberal spirit, which will make possible a friendly settlement of any outstanding issues.

The resolution of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, however, raised a new question, concerning not the rights of individual Indians, but the status of India in the Empire, and the constitutional relations between the great Dependencies, and the deliberative assembly of the responsible premiers of the self-governing nations. It is a question of the utmost moment to the future of India and of the Empire. The decision will rest entirely with the Conference itself. Under its constitution it is complete master of its own composition and procedure. It is not proposed to anticipate that decision or to make recommendations as to how the request of India should be met. But it may be useful to bring forward certain considerations which may help to a clear judgment on the problem.

In the first place there are manifest constitutional difficulties in the way of adopting the proposal. It will be said that a Dependency cannot take rank, so long as she is a Dependency, with self-governing Dominions. It is not a question of dignity or status, but of hard actual fact. The Conference is an assembly of the representatives of governments. But the governments are responsible governments, competent to frame and carry out their own policies.

Were this not so the Conference would have remained the important debating body which it was at first. The Government of India, however, is not what is known in constitutional language as a responsible government. It is subject to the control of His Majesty's Ministers in all the matters which are the subject of the Conference's deliberations; and in these, therefore, it cannot speak with a voice that it can translate into action, unless that action be approved by the Imperial Government, which is itself a party to the Conference. Either India's voice at sessions of the Conference will be an empty utterance, or, if it gains substance by securing the approval of His Majesty's Government, the effect will be to enable the latter to speak with two voices. In other words, the existing constitution of the Imperial Conference finds no place for India. Only when her Government is competent itself to carry out the measures for which its representative would vote will be qualified for admission.

Another objection looks so much to the constitution of the Conference as to history and traditions behind it. All the parties to the Conference at present are self-governing nations, not merely in the sense that their decisions are not controlled by any outside authority, but also in the sense that the popular will determines the decisions. The people elect their representatives to a legislative assembly, and the leader who is supported by a majority of votes in the assembly becomes head of the government. The arrangement which Englishmen painfully evolved for themselves through six centuries of struggle was easily transplanted to the Dominions by people of British stock. But India does not elect representatives to an Indian Parliament, and her Government is not chosen by a majority of representatives. It is true that the elective system has so far been applied for legislative purposes in India that in the Viceroy's Council sit 27 members elected in various ways. But less than half of these are chosen by direct election, and they by specially defined and numerically small class constituencies. The remaining fifteen are chosen as a result of a system of indirect election of an even more complex character. What the ordinary voter gives his voice actually for is for an election to his local municipal or rural board,

but the boards elect to provincial councils, and the elected members of provincial councils elect to the Viceroy's Council. It is apparent that whatever tie unites the elected member with the individual constituent in India is far more attenuated than that with which the Dominions are familiar; and of course the proportion of the entire population which exercises a vote, however, indirectly for legislative purposes is very small. Moreover, in no sense are issues submitted to any of these electorates at times of elections. Members are chosen mainly for their status as men generally representative of a particular interest or religion. Further, the administration is in the hands of the Viceroy and his Executive Council, who are not chosen by the legislative body, but appointed by the Crown. Parliamentary government at the present moment does not exist in India; and probably the objection will be taken that it is anomalous and undesirable that the homogeneity of the Conference should be impaired by imparting into it the representative of a government which, unlike all the others represented, is not in fact responsible to the people.

In essentials the second objection amounts only to a restatement of the first. The first was directed 'outwards', the second inwards. If India had responsible government there would be no doubt as to her attaining the same measure of independence of the Government of the United Kingdom as the Dominions have reached. On the other hand, it is very difficult to think of the Government of India as becoming independent of Whitehall unless it simultaneously becomes constitutionally amenable to the wishes of the people of India. Otherwise it would assume the position of an Asiatic autocracy.

The greatest disservice one could do the cause of India would be to attempt to ignore these difficulties. They are real and they must be faced. However, it is possible to press constitutional niceness too far. The Imperial Conference is not a sovereign assembly. It has no executive authority and no legislative power. It is a purely deliberative or consultative piece of machinery, whereby a number of self-governing units can discuss and at times reach agreement as to common action in common affairs. The Imperial Conference can neither affect the policy of the government of Canada or Australia or Great Britain in their own internal affairs, nor the policy of the Imperial Government in external or defence matters, save by the method of persuasion. The vote of a majority does not bind dissentients. No member to the Conference is bound by anything save his own freely recorded vote. In an assembly of this kind there is obviously room for a representative of a great Dependency, whose admission to a Cabinet which actually decided policy and in which votes were of vital importance it would be far more difficult to justify. What India asks for may be an anomaly. But, if the word "anomaly" could kill, many healthy political growths would never have thriven as they have done. Consider for a moment the conclusion to which severe logic would lead. If India is to be excluded because she is a Dependency and not a Dominion, the result is to defer a concession, which will not injure the self-governing communities and will warmly rejoice the heart of India, for a period which no man can specify. The point was raised by one Indian member who spoke in the debate that self-government should precede participation in the Conference, but the sense of the majority was against him. They wished to pursue directly the end that they believed desirable for its own sake; and it must be admitted that they had good reasons. There is much to be said, on the grounds of expediency, for including a representative of India in the Imperial Conference. It meets to discuss inter-Imperial problems, and among those the problem of India with its 315 million people must take a prominent place. The Secretary of State for India finds it necessary to have at his side a Council mainly composed of advisers with special knowledge of India. It seems not unreasonable to suppose that a Conference of the governments of the Empire when discussing Imperial problems will find the presence of a colleague, who can bring home to them as no Secretary of State can do the ideas and aspirations of the Indian people, of great assistance at their deliberations. To the objection that no government which is not responsible to the people can be

(Continued on page 3)

## To The Mistress Of The House

DEAR MADAM,

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