

The Address—Mr. Mackenzie King

the British empire *inter se*, as well as the relations of each part to foreign countries. For such examination the time at our disposal has been all too short. Yet we hope that we may have laid a foundation on which subsequent conferences may build.

I quote further:

The committee are of the opinion that nothing would be gained by attempting to lay down a constitution for the British empire. Its widely scattered parts have very different characteristics, very different histories, and are at very different stages of evolution; while, considered as a whole, it defies classification and bears no real resemblance to any other political organization which now exists or has ever yet been tried.

There is, however, one most important element in it which, from a strictly constitutional point of view, has now, as regards vital matters, reached its full development—we refer to the group of self-governing communities composed of Great Britain and the dominions. Their position and mutual relation may be readily defined. They are 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.

And a little further down:

Every self-governing member of the empire is now the master of its destiny.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that no words could be clearer than those in defining the present position; and I must say that the position as thus defined is the position which this government accepts as the present one and which it desires to see maintained.

In regard to defence:

The conference gave much consideration to the question of defence, and to the methods by which the defence arrangements of each part of the empire could be most effectively coordinated.

In dealing with defence the first item that is set forth is this:

The resolutions on defence adopted at the last session of the conference are reaffirmed.

The statement there of what was reaffirmed at the previous conference is:

The conference affirms that it is necessary to provide for the adequate defence of the territories and trade of the several countries comprising the British empire. In this connection the conference expressly recognizes that it is for the parliaments of the several parts of the empire, upon the recommendations of their respective governments, to decide the nature and extent of any action which should be taken by them.

There was, I believe, a further conference in 1930 which was attended by Mr. Bennett. I have looked through the proceedings and am unable to see anything which in any way alters the force of the position that was taken at previous conferences in regard to inter-imperial relations. There was an economic

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

conference which was held in this city in 1932, but it did not touch the question of inter-imperial constitutional relations. There was a further conference in London in 1937, the year of the coronation. I had again the honour of representing Canada, along with others, at that conference. At that conference foreign affairs, defence and constitutional questions were all on the agenda for discussion. I have a copy of the report of the conference and this is what is stated with respect to foreign affairs and defence. The chairman made the following statement:

Though we shall discuss other important subjects, we are agreed that questions of foreign affairs and defence shall be our main subjects.

During the discussion emphasis was laid on the importance of developing the practice of communication and consultation between different governments as a help to the coordination of policies.

The conference recorded the results of its deliberations on the subject of foreign affairs, and this is the pertinent paragraph:

While no attempt was made to formulate commitments, which in any event could not be made effective until approved and confirmed by the respective parliaments, the representatives of the governments concerned found themselves in close agreement upon a number of general propositions . . . they declared their intention of continuing to consult and cooperate. . . .

And in the matter of defence—

The conference gave close attention to the subject of defence, and considered ways in which it would be possible for the governments concerned to cooperate in measures for their own security.

In the course of the discussions, the conference found general agreement among its members that the security of each of their countries can be increased by cooperation in such matters as the free interchange of information concerning the state of their naval, military and air forces, the continuance of the arrangements already initiated by some of them for concerting the scale of the defences of ports, and measures for cooperation in the defence of communications and other common interests. At the same time the conference recognized that it is the sole responsibility of the several parliaments of the British commonwealth to decide the nature and scope of their own defence policy.

At that conference I made a statement of Canada's position in regard to imperial conferences, and the place that they occupy in settling matters of policy. I will read it to the house because it is the position which, if I were attending a conference of prime ministers later in the year, as I may, I would wish to maintain at that time.

The task of an imperial conference has been well defined as that of considering whether the several governments represented, while preserving their individual rights of decision and action, can coordinate their various policies in