

PRIVILEGE—MR. CAHAN

IMPERIAL CONFERENCE OF 1926—DESCRIPTION AS
SEPARATIST MOVEMENT FROM BRITISH
COMMONWEALTH

On the orders of the day:

Hon. C. H. CAHAN (St. Lawrence-St. George): On a matter of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I should like to refer briefly to a remark made on the evening of May 24, by the right hon. the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lapointe). The right hon. gentleman stated that during the debate on the imperial conference resolutions of 1926 the hon. member for St. Lawrence-St. George (Mr. Cahan) was one of those who described the work of that conference as—

—a sort of separatist movement from the British Commonwealth, and far from being a bond of association, as my right hon. friend—

—referring to the leader of the opposition (Mr. Bennett)—

—has described it to-day.

I believe that remark has gone out to the press and has been noted. I think it is an entire misapprehension of the attitude I took at that time. Without entering upon a lengthy discussion I should like to read the exact words I uttered on that occasion, and for that purpose I would refer hon. members to the debates of December 14, 1926, at page 54, in which, in discussing the imperial conference resolutions, I said:

For do not such clauses as those implicitly, and yet emphatically, declare that we are partners in the empire, equal in status, if you will, participating as citizens of that empire in the advantages and privileges—world-extended privileges—which accrue to the position and power of membership in the empire; yet, they express by implication that by moral obligation, by the precepts of common and equity law, we, as such partners, equal in status, are in fact morally bound, by the very implications of the contract, to share in the international obligations of the empire and in the liabilities imposed by such obligations to the extent of our resources; and though, as it is stated in another clause, we are the sole judges of the nature and extent of our co-operation, yet the declaration as to our status is made by the representatives of Great Britain, I believe, in the abiding faith and confidence that no common cause will be imperilled by the lack of our support.

The matter came up in a later discussion in the House of Commons on May 29, 1928. This is what I said at that time:

I assume from the position which the Prime Minister took at the recent imperial conference that he realizes the absolute necessity, if we are to preserve the existing unity of the empire,

of consultation and concurrence wherever possible between the governments of the dominions and that of the United Kingdom with respect to matters which appertain to the whole empire to which we belong.

Mr. Mackenzie King: Hear, hear.

Mr. Cahan: I have noticed that certain gentlemen in this country who are admittedly in favour of the early independence of Canada and of breaking the light ties of association which bind us to Great Britain and the other dominions, speak of Canada having become in fact though not in name an independent and practically sovereign state. The imperial conference of 1926 took an entirely different view; as I read it, and I have read it time and again, it seems to me that those who directed the drafting of that report were insisting that all matters which relate solely and exclusively to this dominion should be under the sole and exclusive jurisdiction of the parliament and the administration of this country. So, in the negotiation of treaties, our minister or representative abroad, in those matters which relate solely and exclusively to our interests and to our wellbeing, would have exclusive jurisdiction, but when our interests also become matters of interest to the other dominions, to the United Kingdom and to the empire as a whole, it is implied in the imperial conference report that as far as it is possible for honourable and intelligent men so to do, those representing the various parts of this empire, should strive to reach a concurrent view by consultation and concession, so long as they make no sacrifice of the vital interests of any part, in order to promote the general interests of the autonomous dominions and of Great Britain.

I made several emphatic statements to that effect. Perhaps I might read one more, which appears on page 3503 of Hansard of the same date:

Therefore I feel persuaded that the government of Canada—

That was the government of the day, of which the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) was also the Prime Minister—

—looking at the whole matter, though determined to preserve our autonomous rights, will always be equally determined to preserve the political unity of this empire to which we belong, believing that under present conditions and as far as human minds can see into the future, it is in the paramount interests of Canada that we should preserve that association with Great Britain and the other dominions.

I think these quotations from those two addresses indicate clearly that during the debates on the 1926 resolutions I was not suggesting that they implied a separatist movement from the British commonwealth.

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): May I say to my hon. friend that the passages which he has just quoted certainly do not bear out the inferences to which he has referred. Of course,