

ferences. Here may I say that I regret that this question should come up at this time, because I do think, involving as it does discussion in the press, in public assemblies and elsewhere, it is to a very considerable extent taking the minds of the people off the immediate thing, which is the winning of the war. Why we need worry to-day about the form of organization which the empire is going to take after the war, I cannot understand. I think the thing to-day is to win the war, and when the war is won there will be plenty of time to consider what changes in organization, if any, may be necessary.

Just at this point, lest I should forget it, I have been asked the question at different times whether an address which was recently made in Toronto and which dealt with this particular subject had been brought to my attention before it was delivered. I wish to say to the house that I had no knowledge whatever of what was to be said or of what actually was said until after that particular address was made.

Near the close of the last war there was what was known as the imperial war conference of 1917. The suggestion was made by that conference that there should be a meeting for the purpose of considering constitutional relations within the empire. From that day to the present no conference that has been held in Britain has sought in any way to attempt to form an organization which would deprive in any particular the different legislative bodies of the commonwealth of full control over their own affairs.

The first conference of prime ministers which was held after the war took place in 1921. At that conference—I believe that Canada was represented by the Right Hon. Arthur Meighen—the following resolution was passed:

The prime ministers of the United Kingdom and the dominions, having carefully considered the recommendation of the imperial war conference of 1917 that a special imperial conference should be summoned as soon as possible after the war to consider the constitutional relations of the component parts of the empire, have reached the following conclusions:

(a) Continuous consultation to which the prime ministers attach no less importance than the imperial war conference of 1917, can only be secured by a substantial improvement in the communications between the component parts of the empire. Having regard to the constitutional developments since 1917, no advantage is to be gained by holding a constitutional conference.

That was the view taken after the last war, in 1921, that no advantage would be gained by having a conference to deal with these particular questions of constitutional relations within the empire.

The next imperial conference came in 1923. I was present at that conference, as one of the representatives of Canada. That conference had occasion to deal with questions of foreign relations, communications, signature and ratification of treaties, and matters of defence. The position taken by the conference in these matters is set out very clearly in the following statement, under "Foreign Affairs". After the conference had discussed foreign affairs at some length the statement concludes:

This conference is a conference of representatives of the several governments of the empire; its views and conclusions on foreign policy, as recorded above, are necessarily subject to the action of the governments and parliaments of the various portions of the empire, and it trusts that the results of its deliberations will meet with their approval.

There was this statement with regard to defence:

The conference gave special consideration to the question of defence and the manner in which cooperation and mutual assistance could best be effected, after taking into account the political and geographical conditions of the various parts of the empire.

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.

The next conference came in 1926. I was also present at that conference. It was not until 1926 that any conference attempted to develop what might be known as a formula which would set out the existing relations between the different parts of the empire; but at that conference a committee, which was headed by the late Lord Balfour, did present a statement which was adopted by the conference, and which set out in the clearest manner possible the views of the different representatives as to interimperial relations. I read from the report of the conference of 1926:

All the questions on the agenda affecting interimperial relations were referred by the conference to a committee of prime ministers and heads of delegations, of which Lord Balfour was asked to be chairman.

The committee reported as follows:

We were appointed at the meeting of the imperial conference on October 25, 1926, to investigate all the questions on the agenda affecting interimperial relations. Our discussions on these questions have been long and intricate. We found, on examination, that they involved consideration of fundamental principles affecting the relations of the various parts of