

Given this position, it is frequently suggested that action should be taken at once, whether by the parliament of Canada alone, or by the parliaments of Canada and the United Kingdom acting jointly, to establish the right of Canada, in the event of war to choose between the status of belligerency and the status of neutrality. Or as it is sometimes put, it is urged it should be established that the sole advisers of his majesty who can advise him to issue a declaration of war as regards Canada are his majesty's Canadian advisers.

In considering this question it is essential to bear in mind the limitations of any parliamentary action that might be taken regarding the exercise of ministerial advice to the crown; for example, that action should be taken by parliament to provide that a declaration by his majesty on the advice of his Canadian ministers will be necessary to give Canada the legal status of belligerency.

It would not be consistent with the actual facts to conclude that the original legal position in this regard had not been modified in any degree by the long and far-reaching trend of constitutional development. Equally it would be closing one's eyes to facts to imagine that action of the character suggested would solve all the anomalies or contradictions in the commonwealth relationship. It should certainly not be overlooked that declarations of war have in some measure gone out of fashion. The proposal would obviously not meet the case where no declaration of war was made. Nor can it be assumed that any such declaration would necessarily deter the enemy from taking immediate hostile action on the ground that the general relationship between the several members of the commonwealth warranted it in regarding all parts as belligerents. In this respect, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's statement still expresses a reality which we cannot ignore and for which we must make due preparation in defence.

I recognize that those who are advocating and supporting the proposal to which I have referred regard it as a logical consequence, a necessary implication, of our long evolution toward self-government. It registers the conclusion that it would not be consistent with the present relationship of the members of the commonwealth to hold that the king would act for Canada as regards war and peace on the advice of any other one of his governments, but not on the advice of his government in Canada itself. It is put forward as a recognition of the necessity of the people, the parliament, the government of this country accepting adult responsibility for a course that

so vitally affects them, rather than throwing that responsibility on other members of the commonwealth or their governments.

I do not myself think that at the present time it is either necessary or desirable to seek the enactment of such legislation. I shall not go into the legal question to which I have already referred, or into the further question on which there is also a difference among the legal experts, as to whether action by the parliament of Canada alone would suffice to establish a new position, or whether action by the parliament of the United Kingdom would also be necessary. I have already referred to the fact that to seek legal action now might be taken to mean that it had been definitely concluded that the old legal position has not been affected by constitutional development, and to mean that to-day it would not be His Majesty's Government of Canada upon whose advice His Majesty the King would issue a declaration of war affecting Canada. I shall confine myself to the brief statement of two further considerations which in my mind render it undesirable to follow the suggested course.

In the first place, action to that effect, if legislatively possible, would be carried through only at the cost of passionate controversy and acute differences of opinion. Why, I ask, divide Canada to provide against a contingency that may not arise, or if it does arise, may not come until the situation has materially changed? The same consideration of the overwhelming importance of national unity which has led this government to decline to make premature and inappropriate statements of possible belligerency prevent it from recommending action to declare possible neutrality.

But this is not the only consideration. Action of this nature at this time would be aid and comfort to any country which might be inclined to aggressive action against the democratic peoples or against the United Kingdom specifically. Such a country would inevitably draw the conclusion, whether logically well founded or not, that our seeking, under the present conditions of the world, the legal power to remain neutral, implied a definite decision to remain neutral in any and every conflict that country might precipitate. That would be a most unwarranted conclusion, a most unfortunate result. No country now has or should be given any ground for counting that in the event of aggression against the United Kingdom this country has decided to stand aloof, decided against taking an appropriate part if such a struggle were thrust upon her.