

*The Address—Mr. Mackenzie King*

Mr. GUTHRIE: How much right had it when the French treaty was brought back by Mr. Fielding?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I have already pointed out to my hon. friend that there is a great difference between agreements that may be reached between this country and a foreign country, and agreements made at an imperial conference between different parts of the British Empire. There may be an agreement between one part of the empire and a foreign country on the understanding that it will be submitted to parliament with a possibility of rejection. If submitted and not ratified, well and good; that is understood as a possibility and therefore rejection is of no political significance. It may be of significance from a purely commercial point of view. But so far as—

Mr. CHAPLIN: Was this parliament able to change anything in the Australian treaty?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: So far as these agreements are concerned, although we do not even know the terms of them, I say, regardless of what they may involve, it cannot be said that if this parliament refuses to approve them, the refusal will not be construed as an act of disloyalty to the empire and an act threatening disruption within the empire itself. This, I say, is an entirely different thing and a very serious thing. Refusal would have a political as well as a commercial significance.

Mr. STEVENS: Will the right hon. gentleman permit one question?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes.

Mr. STEVENS: Was the drafting and signing and the ratification of the Australian treaty in 1925 any different from what is being done now?

Mr. VALLANCE: In that case there was a six months' cancellation.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: It was different.

Mr. STEVENS: Not a particle.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Not a particle, says my hon. friend.

Mr. STEVENS: In principle, not in detail.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Perhaps I might as well take up at once the point raised by the Minister of Trade and Commerce. To my mind, there is a vast difference between an agreement which is subject to cancellation at the end of six months and an agreement which is to remain in force for five years.

Mr. STEVENS: That is not the point.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I ask this question. We have not seen the agreements, but one feature of them we know is that they are to be binding upon the different parts of the empire affected for a period of five years. If they involve increases in the tariff then those increases are to be binding for the next five years. If they stipulate that, so far as the tariff is concerned, it shall remain where at present it stands with respect to certain commodities, then it will so remain for five years. It so provides on the part of Canada as well as on the part of Great Britain. If that is the fact, I say that it is circumscribing the fiscal freedom and independent action of this parliament; it is putting a chain and ball around parliament in its freedom in negotiating treaties with other countries wherever these particular obligations may come to be factors in such negotiations; and to that extent it would be violating the fundamental principles of freedom in the determination of this country's fiscal policy.

But worse than mere restriction upon negotiation is the effect which agreements of the kind may have in binding subsequent parliaments. I think I am able to cite, with respect to the impropriety of the binding of one parliament by another, an authority who should not be questioned, at least by hon. gentlemen opposite. I should like to quote to the house what the present Prime Minister said only a year or two ago, when standing where I am now, with respect to one parliament seeking to bind another. It was in the matter of a very small outlay of money to meet a purely local improvement in the city of Ottawa—not a great question of fiscal policy, not something which bound all parties in their fiscal rights for a period of years, but merely a question of a sum of money to be voted to the improvement commission in the city of Ottawa for a term of years. What did the right hon. gentleman say on that occasion? Speaking in the House of Commons on April 24, 1928, at page 2352 of Hansard, he said:

I suggest to the government the desirability of substituting the word "five" for the word "thirty." Five years is the life of a parliament, and I cannot think it quite consonant with the ideas of the right hon. gentleman as heretofore expressed that this parliament should bind the hands of future parliaments. I am quite aware of the fact that it would be quite competent for succeeding parliaments to change that figure to forty or to ten; they would have that power, but a vested interest is acquired when a statute of this kind is passed by parliament; the commission naturally expects that that is the end of it.

My right hon. friend there speaks of a vested interest. Is any vested interest