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Why I Am Against Imperial Federation

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YOU do me the honour of asking my opinion on the important and far-reaching problem of colonial representation in Imperial Councils, as foreshadowed in Mr. Borden's recent utterances in London.

You ask me: *Are you in favour of Imperial Federation?* Allow me to give you an answer as straight and direct as the question itself: *No, I am not in favour of Imperial Federation.*

On the principle of colonial government, particularly as regards Canada, I have expressed myself quite conclusively on many occasions, in the House of Commons, on the public platform and through the press, in England and English-speaking Canada, as well as in this Province of Quebec.

To Imperial Federation I am opposed because I do not think it is workable. Suppose some form of government and parliament could be devised for the whole Empire—and I am free to admit that, like all British institutions, it may grow and shape itself into form by a gradual process of facts long before any rigid formula needs be placed into any statute book—far from bringing closer the various portions of the Empire, it would open, pave and widen the road to dangerous frictions and conflicts, which could not fail to arise between communities of energetic and self-willed British subjects, so far apart in climate, in economics, in social conditions and even in political aspirations.

Moreover, so long as no sensible and thoughtful Federationist has indicated what is to be done with India, in that new partnership of British nations, I fail to see how it could work out.

India represents four-fifths, or at least three-fourths, of the total population of the Empire. Its admission into the partnership on the basis of representation by population would be preposterous. Would it then be left, as at present, under the exclusive authority and jurisdiction of one of the State Departments of the British Government, solely responsible to the British Parliament and the electorate of the United Kingdom? Then, what becomes of the reality of partnership?

The basic principle of the proposed Federation is to apportion, between the Motherland and the self-governing colonies, the burden of naval and military defence and, as an indispensable corollary, the supreme authority over Imperial forces, by land and by sea, and Imperial diplomacy, which controls foreign relations, and shapes, governs and settles the events of peace and war. This Mr. Borden himself has stated, in his late declarations in London, as clearly as a Canadian politician and a weather-beaten lawyer can do.

Now, can any close observer of events and student of British affairs deny that the possession of India, with its enormous responsibilities, has been, since the consolidation of that tremendous Empire under the rule of Britain, the main pivot of British foreign policy? Almost every war waged by Great Britain for a century and a half, nearly every alliance or rupture between Great Britain and the powers of both hemispheres, the acquisition of a vast portion of her Crown Colonies and Protectorates, were or are related, directly or indirectly, to India.

How, therefore, could Canada and the other junior partners admitted into the sanctuary heretofore reserved to the High Pontiffs of the Empire, exercise any effective authority over the diplomacy of the Empire and its military and naval forces—how could they really exercise their joint control



of all things, internal or external, that make for peace or war—if the very soul and bottom of Imperial policy escape their authority and still remain under the exclusive care of the senior partner?

The same question could be asked with regard to the Crown Colonies, the Protectorates and spheres of British influence in all parts of the world.

And the obvious answer to both questions is, that there is no Federation possible, that there can be no real Imperial partnership, unless the India and Colonial Offices are put under the jurisdiction of the Federated Parliament, just as completely and effectively as the Foreign Affairs, the Navy and the Army.

The Danger of the Colour Problem.

NOW, would it be safe? Are we prepared and can we afford, in Canada, Australia and the other self-governing colonies, who still have so much to do to build their own houses and put them in shape and order, are we prepared to supersede the British, with their magnificent traditions, their long experience and their splendid civil service, in the administration of those vast dominions?

But suppose all that could shape itself into working order, what would be done with one single problem, that of coloured immigration in the white colonies—not to speak of many other difficulties?

At the last Imperial Conference, Earl Crewe stated, and rightly so, that until that vexatious question was settled in a way to satisfy the legitimately offended pride of the superior races of India, it was useless to talk of a United Empire.

At the same Conference, such a staunch Imperialist as Sir Joseph Ward stated emphatically that for no consideration of Imperial unity, would New Zealand remove the slightest restriction against Hindu immigration; and the Australian delegates endorsed and emphasized that statement.

For the present, the British Government and the India Department have succeeded, although with increasing difficulty, in opposing, to Hindu protests and pleas, the existing system of colonial autonomy and decentralization. In other words, they have disclaimed all responsibility in the adoption of exclusion laws in the self-governing colonies, and pleaded their political impotency in preventing the operation of those laws.

But if there is a federated Imperial Parliament, in which the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa are represented on a footing of proportionate equality—and without

THE reputation of Mr. Henri Bourassa as orator, writer, leader of the third Canadian political party—the Nationalists—is too well known to need any comment. Whatever difference of opinion exists as to his political views, no one may say that he arrives at them superficially or hastily. Mr. Bourassa is a thinker. His other chief characteristic is that he is not afraid to state his opinions frankly and without regard to the effect upon his career.

The following article, by Mr. Henri Bourassa, is peculiarly timely in view of recent utterances of Mr. Borden in London. The Prime Minister of Canada said the other day:

"Any great Dominion, undertaking to share upon a permanent basis in the sea defence of the Empire, must have some voice in the policy which shapes the issues of peace and war."

It is clear from Mr. Bourassa's article, that if Mr. Borden's naval policy involves some scheme of Imperial federation, it will not meet with the support of Mr. Bourassa and the Nationalists.

it, partnership there cannot be—how could the British authorities avoid bringing the question to a final issue through that Imperial Parliament or Council? Surely, if there is a question of Imperial concern, this is one. How would it be settled? In the sense of India, or in that of the white Colonies? If the view of a white Australia is maintained, drawing-room Empire makers in Toronto had better inform themselves in London, as to what shall happen in India.

If, on the contrary, the policy of conciliation and of the open door, claimed by the people of India, is adopted and imposed on the people of Australia and New Zealand—not to speak of British Columbia—they should enquire in Sydney, Melbourne and Wellington, as to the probable results there.

Not later than last summer, a leading Australian journalist wrote, in one of the English reviews, that Australia was ready to contribute more than her share to Imperial defence and assume her portion of Imperial authority and responsibility; but that, if Imperial partnership meant the breaking down or the lowering of the walls raised against Hindu immigration, the whole of Australia, not only would recede from any sort of Imperial organization, but would raise arms and fight to the last man against Britain herself—because they would rather die as white free men than consent to be drowned by a flood of Asiatic immigration.*

Let it be hoped that Mr. Borden and his colleagues will hold a frank and thorough discussion with the British authorities on this, the gravest internal issue which the British Empire has to face. The days they may employ in that study will be of greater use to them and the Canadian people, than the inquiry they may make and the information they may get as to the resisting power of France, the intentions of Russia, or even the fighting capacity of the German fleet.

The Difficulty of Defence.

AS regards the question of Canada's contribution to Imperial defence, nothing has yet been stated in London, either by Canadian or by British

* "The Australian Fleet," by James Edmond, in the *National Review*, July, 1911