

As I have already said, there have been other conferences. At every conference the method adopted has been for all parts of the empire to discuss very freely what arrangements were likely to be most in the interests of all concerned. After having discussed matters as fully as they could be discussed, and after having as nearly as possible reached a tentative agreement as to what should be done the members of the different governments have returned to their own parliaments, and each ministry has brought into its parliament such measures as it felt would command the support of that body. So far as I am aware, in dealing in inter-imperial relations the argument heretofore never has been used that something can be done in one part only by all parts of the empire doing it. In other words, that we are no longer free to settle in our own parliament what our fiscal policy is to be because that has been settled for us by a meeting of the executives of different parts of the empire, and that without consultation with their several parliaments in advance. If anything of the kind obtains, that perhaps is the most serious feature of these agreements as they may be viewed objectively.

I do not know that I could better illustrate what I have in mind at the moment than by reading the first line of an item which I saw in an Ottawa paper a day or two ago, with regard to the agreements to be laid on the table of the house during the present week. Here are the words:

The British Empire's new fiscal system, established at the Imperial conference, will go into operation next week.

I ask hon. members to note that statement; I think it expresses as a statement of fact what many of them have in mind.

In other words, that we are to have from now on, that we have it now in concrete form in these agreements, in their relation one to the other, an imperial policy which has been decided, not by the parliaments of the empire but by those who happened to be members of the executives of the different governments which met together here and arrived at agreements which are now ironclad. May I ask hon. members this question. None of us other than the ministers has seen the agreements. Will this House of Commons have the right to alter one line of those agreements? Will this house have any opportunity of lowering or raising any duties as fixed in those agreements? Will the British government have that right? On the contrary, will not all legislative bodies be told, "These agreements were arrived at in the conference

at Ottawa and they are to be put through without any change whatever". What then becomes of the freedom of parliament? What is the significance of parliament in that event? Why have a parliament at all, if executives of different parts of the empire can meet together and lay down a new imperial policy and compel its adoption by the imputation of a want of patriotism or a desire to bring about the dismemberment of the empire, as against those who are not prepared to support such measures?

In this House of Commons we have all along taken strong exception to the executive taking into its own hands the right to say what the tariff shall be and after parliament has enacted a measure, defeating by order in council, through executive action, the ends which parliament had in view. That procedure, I say, is all wrong. We have taken exception, and rightly so, as every other British parliament will take exception to such executive action on the part of any government in the empire. I contend—hon. gentlemen may endeavour to argue the point away—that what we have at the present time is action not by the executive of this parliament alone but by the executives of the various parliaments of the empire working together—action under the guise of separate agreements but which is nevertheless establishing what this paper announces as a new British Empire fiscal system. Now, if such is the case, that is a very serious thing, and I hope the Prime Minister will let us know whether or not this is the case. I remember very well that when my colleague the former Minister of Justice (Mr. Lapointe) and I returned from one imperial conference in England, no one was stronger than the present Minister of Justice (Mr. Guthrie) in the assertion that neither of us, nor any representatives of a government in the empire, would have the right to go to the imperial conference and there decide a question of imperial policy.

Mr. GUTHRIE: Yes, because you would not submit it to parliament for ratification.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Not at all; that was not the point which my hon. friend was making at the time. He was perfectly right in his contention that no ministers of the crown from Canada had any right, in London, to determine as imperial policy what was to be the policy of this country.

Mr. GUTHRIE: Subject to the right of parliament to accept or reject.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend says, subject to the right of rejection. How much right has this House of Commons—