

I venture to reply that the Colonial Office will do its best to meet it. I cannot answer the question as to whether the Conference will so act, but I should not like to pass this opportunity of thanking Sir Wilfrid Laurier for an expression of his opinion of the work done, and the spirit in which work had been done by the Colonial Office during the long period of his experience. It is a testimony which we value very much. I would venture on my own part to say that my experience, so far as it goes, would certainly be in the same direction, and I say that with the greater freedom because I am not a permanent member of this Office; I am only one of those political will-o'-the-wisps who pass through it and have gone. I have found here, I am bound to say, in the members of the staff of this Office, an absolutely single-minded devotion to the interests committed to their charge, and a determination to deal with the affairs of the Colonies as they come to them without fear, or prejudice, or favour.

Now, gentlemen, I say that if the Conference will allow us we are quite prepared to undertake to do our best to devise methods for securing the continuity which is desired. As I said, I have had this matter under consideration, and I might, perhaps, have elaborated a scheme for submission to this Conference, but I thought that on the whole it was better not to forestall the Conference. I desire to get suggestions from the members of the Conference, which I shall, of course, be only too pleased to take advantage of so far as I can. But if the principle is accepted, further conferences of, perhaps, a more confidential character, may take place during the course of our proceedings, and the matter may be arranged. If this could be done it appears to me that we should secure the greater part, if not the whole, of the propositions put before us in the resolution from Australia. If the Conference should lay stress upon any subject the consideration of it would be early and would be continuous; any inquiry would be completed, and when the inquiry was completed, then the subject would be fully prepared with the fullest details, as Mr. Deakin desires, for the next Conference; or, what I think is a suggestion which should not be overlooked or disregarded, it might in many cases with great advantage be dealt with, as the shipping question has been dealt with this year—by a subsidiary conference which could meet with less inconvenience, no doubt, to the Colonies and Colonial Ministers, but which, as that Conference to which I have referred shows, may have great results. The Prime Minister called your attention to that on Monday.

I do not know that I can add very much, and I hope I have not detained the meeting at too great length as it is. I have endeavoured to put frankly before you the difficulties which His Majesty's Government would feel in establishing a body independent of the Government of this country. May I say one word with regard to the suggestion that this secretariat should be under the Prime Minister. I have only to bear my testimony to what Sir Wilfrid Laurier has said as to the extreme strain which would be put on the Prime Minister by such a course. I cannot think myself that it can be the case that the business would be of small dimensions. I hope and believe that the communications between ourselves and the Governments of the responsible self-governing Colonies will for long be constant, and that we shall act in concert, and the more we do so, the more important it is that the business should be transacted in a large office where we can command full strength.

An observation was made, I think, by Sir Joseph Ward, with regard to the opportunities that this system which has been adumbrated might give for communications between the Colonies themselves. I do not quite understand why there should be a difficulty now. According to our present system, I think when a subject arises between us and any one Colony, which may be of interest to others, it is our practice to forward the communication

Second Day.
17 April 1907.

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PROPOSED
IMPERIAL
COUNCIL.
(Chairman.)