

*1st Day.]*

AGENDA AND DAYS FOR MEETINGS.

[23 May, 1911.]

The PRESIDENT : Then we will proceed on that basis. Then we come back, Mr. Fisher, to the question you were raising—the order in which the subjects of discussion should be taken. The suggestion here is that we should begin to-day the Imperial Council and the Organization of the Colonial Office, and continue that subject, which is a very large one, on Thursday.

Mr. FISHER : Perhaps Sir Wilfrid wants to say something on that point first?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : No.

Mr. FISHER : I think the Declaration of London raises a more important question. It raises the point that the Dominions should be fully informed of treaty negotiations before they are signed or declared. I thought it would be more convenient if, before it was submitted to a committee, the Conference should discuss it.

The PRESIDENT : It was never intended to submit that to a committee.

Mr. FISHER : That is right.

The PRESIDENT : I should have thought that that aspect of the Declaration of London, apart from the merits of the Declaration itself, the question of communication or non-communication, could be used by way of illustration in the discussion on the Imperial Council. That is independent of the merits of the Declaration itself; it is a question merely of procedure. All the arguments drawn from the Declaration of London would be quite relevant for discussion on this topic. The Declaration itself raises several questions of policy which are quite independent.

Mr. FISHER : We do not intend to press the question of policy unduly. If that question could be discussed and a method of getting over that difficulty discovered, we should be very glad indeed.

The PRESIDENT : I think that would be clearly relevant.

Mr. FISHER : At any rate, we should like it to get a little earlier attention. We feel that the question raised is more important.

The PRESIDENT : That is the principle of the means of communication.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : If I may say so, Mr. Fisher, I think the Agenda proposal is perhaps the most logical. The first is to discuss the Imperial Council, that is to say, the relations of the Dominions beyond the seas with the Imperial Government here. In my estimation there is no more important question before the Conference that we have to discuss; and then I think the Declaration of London might be taken up, because the Declaration of London is a very technical subject in itself, and might be better discussed, perhaps, when we have decided what we should do here with regard to the Imperial Council. In deference to your wishes, for my part, Mr. Fisher, I would be very happy if you were to take it up immediately after that preliminary question.

Mr. FISHER : That would suit me. We feel that it involves a principle of the very gravest kind, not that a solution cannot be found for that difficulty; but to leave it to the last item would be practically shelving it altogether. Our desire is to get the matter before this Conference and find a solution, if possible, of our difficulty which has arisen, and will arise in the future, in our opinion.