

2nd Day.]

RECONSTITUTION OF THE COLONIAL OFFICE.

[25 May, 1911.]

Mr. HARCOURT—*cont.*

mittee would naturally reach it through the Governor-General and the Secretary of State, but would, no doubt, be also made at the same time to the High Commissioners with such instructions as the Dominions wished to give them.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Do you say the information would be given to the High Commissioners to enable them to make representation to their representatives on the Committee?

Mr. HARCOURT: No, to the representatives of the Dominions. The Dominions would, of course, instruct the High Commissioners as they wished.

The PRESIDENT: It provides for the case where a particular Dominion did not choose its High Commissioner, but some other person, to represent it on the Committee.

Mr. HARCOURT: I think it would add to the flexibility and to the value of such a Committee if the Secretary of State had the power to summon to any of its meetings either the political or the permanent heads of other Government Departments here on any questions specially affecting them of which they had the best technical knowledge, and which might be raised at a special meeting of this Committee. Of course, it would be perhaps necessary for you, gentlemen, to define a little more clearly what is the status which you wish your High Commissioners to occupy here, because it is possible you might wish to have a special representative on this Committee and not always to be represented by your High Commissioners. It is really a matter for your definition of the status which you wish them to occupy in relation to these matters. We should equally be glad to accept, of course, special representatives, so long as there was not a very frequent change, because a very frequent change of individuals does not lead to continuity of knowledge or of work.

I do not know that I need say more as to the particular limitations or powers of that Committee. I think it would be a pity, if the Dominions agreed to the constitution of such a body, to tie it down too closely; but it is quite obvious that people outside and people inside ought not to derive, even from the earliest moment, any idea that it was to be an executive or legislative body, but only to be a Committee for purely consultative and advisory purposes. It is proposed merely to meet what we view to be a general desire of the Dominions to be in closer touch, through their own representatives, with the Home Government.

Mr. FISHER: Or to have more efficient and quicker means of communication.

The PRESIDENT: Both from you to us, and from us to you.

Mr. FISHER: Yes.

Mr. HARCOURT: It is no real change of our relations, but a strengthening of the unity of the Imperial Conference, which we are all happy to feel has come to stay as a permanent institution, and to make it more continuously useful both to the Dominions and ourselves.

Mr. BATCHELOR: Would that Advisory Committee make a joint recommendation?

Mr. HARCOURT: They would consider Conference questions, either past or to come, and would no doubt advise the Secretary of State, who is a member of it. They might arrive at decisions, but have no power to enforce those decisions. Those decisions would be communicated to the Dominion Governments by the Secretary of State through the Governor-General, and by the High Commissioners themselves to their own Governments, and would be a matter for future correspondence or for a subsidiary Conference here.

Sir EDWARD MORRIS: There is just one question I would like to ask. Once that Committee were constituted, how would their decision be carried out? Would it be communicated jointly to the Governor-General and to the Government?