

5th Day.]

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[8 June, 1911.]

The CHAIRMAN: No; they will be called together when there is business to do.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: I must say, frankly, for my part I do not view with any favour any departure from the system we have now; but I would defer my judgment until we have heard what Sir Joseph Ward has to say, because I have an open mind on this question; but I know Sir Joseph Ward feels more strongly on the subject than I do.

As I understand it now, the powers of this Committee would be very much limited, as will be seen from condition 5 of the memorandum. "The advice of the Committee would be given to the Secretary of State, and communicated to the Dominions Governments through the Governor-General, though the High Commissioners or Dominions' representatives would, of course, be free to inform their Governments of the proceedings at the Committee." I would reserve my judgment, and perhaps Sir Joseph Ward would give us the benefit of his views upon it, because he seems to think strongly on this matter.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I spoke on the resolution that I submitted in the first instance, and I explained why I thought it was desirable that something in the direction contained in those resolutions should be established; and in the course of the discussion I understood you to say that you had no objection to No. 1 if it was proposed. As far as I am concerned, I do not wish to press any special portion of it; I believe myself it is of considerable importance that there should be some bridge between the meetings of the Imperial Conference over which from time to time could be carried the matters that had not been brought to a final issue, or, in cases where a general decision, if not by resolution, a course of action is expressed in the various views of the different members attending the Conference. I consider that there should be an opportunity, as points would arise connected with them, no doubt, of their being discussed, with a view to something practical or finality on different points being arrived at.

When we were here in 1907 there was a movement in this direction made. On the whole, while it has been carried out as well as it possibly could be done under the circumstances, I do not think it is complete enough, and I am inclined to think we ought to have a Standing Committee, although I do not quite fall in with some of the proposals contained in the memorandum which has been submitted this morning. For instance, just to make the point clear, I think it would be a very invidious thing to ask the different countries to appoint "the High Commissioner or other representative"; because once you put in a proposal to appoint the High Commissioner or other representative, if any of the oversea Dominions left out the High Commissioner, it would be looked upon by the outside world as a stamp of inferiority being put upon him, so putting the Government in the very invidious position of every time having to appoint the High Commissioner whether they desired it or not.

Another thing is the point I referred to in discussing this matter before—that it is not quite desirable to have the principal executive officer of the oversea Dominions here acting under the authority and direction of his Government and at the same time a member of a Committee which might in some matters come in conflict with his high and responsible duties in his special office. I do not think it quite the most satisfactory thing from the point of view of the responsible Governments across the seas, to put an officer who has to take his direction from them in the position of being an adviser to them in conjunction with the Imperial Conference, whereas at the meetings of the Imperial Conference he has no status whatever. I do not say positively that the High Commissioner should not be on the Committee, but the matter is one that requires to be very carefully considered. So that I think it would be better in any case, if this proposal of Mr. Harcourt's is agreed to, to leave out the High Commissioner, and just simply to put "Representative for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa," letting the Governments have the power to appoint whom they desire.