

8 June, 1911.]

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[5th Day.]

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

the points referred to them; and it is equally certain that no one can prepare an Agenda Paper for the consideration of the Imperial Conference, at which Ministers must assemble, except the Governments themselves—the British Government, and each of the Governments of the oversea Dominions. Wherein can arise the possible consequences such as have been debated under a system which does not admit of those consequences being possible? The system of preparation of work for the Conference remains exactly as it is now, and the question as to whether there are to be allowed into this room all the representatives who form a committee of the kind, if it is established, is a matter of no consequence whatever, to my mind. I assume that the permanent officials now attached to His Majesty's Government, and who, under the direction of the Secretary of State, have a great deal to do in the preparatory work for the consideration of Members who attend the Prime Ministers' Conference—that is, the Imperial Conference—would be here under the altered circumstances as they are now. Why should not a further four or five members who represent the oversea Dominions take a similar place without any loss of dignity, and certainly without any loss of prestige, and without any possibility of their being offended at what was done? I will go further and say, even if they are offended at what may be done by the full Conference, they ought to take their offence cheerfully, and allow us to proceed upon the lines we think right as the outcome of the valuable work prepared by them in the interim for such a Conference as this. Such preparatory work I think would be invaluable. What is the position to-day with regard to this Conference? We have already relegated a number of very important matters to the consideration of sub-committees. That has been done with a view to shortening the time of the Imperial Conference itself. If this Conference could sit here for three months I do not think there is a member now sitting at this table who will contradict me when I say that the relegation of matters which we believe to be of great importance to our respective countries to sub-committees of the Conference would not take place. In other words, such matters would be discussed by all the members of the Imperial Conference itself sitting at this table. Now, what is to happen if there is no system of having a bridge that can carry on the important work which we, through force of circumstances, now relegate to sub-committees?

General BOTHA : Cannot the Secretary of State do it as well?

Sir JOSEPH WARD : I am going to point out how, in my opinion, he cannot do it. However ably and however well the duties of the Secretary of State are discharged, there are some matters which we are now referring for consideration to a sub-committee, in order that the result may be reported to this Conference, which it would be absolutely unfair and improper to ask the Secretary of State to settle by himself, with due regard to the points of view of the oversea Dominions. For instance, we have already decided to refer to sub-committees the important questions concerning trade marks, patent laws, and details connected with shipping laws, and company law, and currency, uniformity of coinage, and taxation, and death duties—matters concerning the people in our respective countries which require to be dealt with as far as possible in a uniform way. What practical position do we arrive at in connection with this important four-year Conference upon some of these matters, which cannot be said to stand out as great proposals of policy relating to any of the oversea Governments or to the Imperial Government, but which are all of vital importance to many of the people in our respective countries? What chance has the next Imperial Conference, taking place in four years from now, of doing any more than we have done at this meeting of the Imperial Conference, or than we did at the last meeting of the Imperial Conference, beyond bringing these matters up for consideration, because of the absence of machinery for the purpose?

As these are questions which vitally affect our own people in our own countries, it would be unfair and improper to ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies of the day, after we have left this Conference, to suggest to us, without our having any voice or say of any sort or kind in connection with the discussion which may take place on the details of these matters, what should be done at