

5th Day.]

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[8 June, 1911.]

The CHAIRMAN : I suppose when a Dominion is represented at the Conference by its own Ministers, the members of the Committee would no longer take part in the Conference.

General BOTHA : I am only raising this one point to show you what is likely to happen. Those men would say : " We have to carry out the Prime Ministers' work here at this Conference, but we do not understand the details of the work and the discussions that have taken place at the Conference." I am only mentioning that there is some difficulty, and that it would not be all clear sailing after we have appointed the Committee.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : It will have all the information regarding the work of the Conference, because everything is published.

General BOTHA : Still they are then part and parcel of this Conference. They must carry out the Conference work if we accept this suggestion. They must not only carry out the work, but they will also assist in preparing what is to be discussed at the next Conference.

The CHAIRMAN : I do not think they could possibly be members of the Conference when they met. That, I think, would not be approved of by any Dominion. Of course, if Ministers wished to have them in the room in order to consult them, that is a different matter; but I should have thought it was desirable when the Conference took place, for Ministers alone to represent their Dominions.

General BOTHA : I quite agree.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Permanent Under-Secretary and so on, have been at this Conference all through; and so could the other representatives be here in the same way.

General BOTHA : I do not want to have any misunderstanding; I want the thing made quite clear now, otherwise you will find there will be difficulty afterwards. Let us settle all this to begin with. I do think the responsible man at those Conferences must be the Minister of the Imperial Government who presides over them. I think that is the really responsible man for the carrying out of the resolutions that are taken here. Sir Joseph Ward said just now that this is a forward move in the right direction. I am not quite sure that it is; because if you want to take any responsibility away from the Secretary of State, who is to be the connecting link between us and the Dominions? Our High Commissioners or the men we are going to place here to carry out these resolutions will have no influence, and never can have the same influence as the British Minister who presides at this Conference.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : If that was so, General Botha, you would be right; but read clause 3 in the proposed arrangements. If you will allow me I will read it : " Being a Committee of the Imperial Conference, it must deal only with matters which concern the past Conference or have to do with the preparations for the approaching one, or for any other matters which seem to be appropriate questions between both."

General BOTHA : I quite agree that this looks very innocent. You said just now, Sir Joseph, that this was a move in the right direction, but it might lead up to that Imperial Council which I very strongly object to.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : It is bound to come anyhow, quite irrespective of this.

The CHAIRMAN : I might point out that the subsidiary conferences which have been held from time to time, may and do consist sometimes of High Commissioners or other Ministers sitting together. The Copyright Conference was so composed, but of course it did not lead to any suggestion that the people who composed the subsidiary conferences should attend or be members of this Conference.