

8 June, 1911.]

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[5th Day.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER—*cont.*

The greatest importance is attached, and, I think, should be attached, to those Conferences which have been held periodically under the system which was adopted four years ago of Governments and Governments; but I would view with serious apprehension the interference of any body whatever between the Government here and the Governments in the respective Dominions. If this body is to be anything at all, it will try to exercise its own views and to impress its own views on the Government here and upon the other Governments. It would be either that or it would mean nothing at all. Therefore, for my part, I have not changed my view. I still adhere to the position I took up four years ago, that the relations between the Dominion Governments and the Imperial Government should be carried on by themselves. We have ample machinery now in the reorganization of the Colonial Office, which has given ample satisfaction; and, therefore, for my part, I adhere to the proposition that I should leave matters just as they are at the present time, and that this would not be an improvement upon them.

Mr. MALAN : Before you reply on the discussion, Sir, I would just like to add a few words to what General Botha has already said. One of the difficulties we feel in connection with this proposal is that we do not know exactly what the status of this Conference or Committee will be. Condition 2 of your proposal says : "It should be advisory of the Secretary of State." Now, to begin with, Condition 3 says : "Being a Committee of the Imperial Conference." This Imperial Conference is not advisory of the Secretary of State. It is a Conference of responsible Ministers, Prime Ministers from the Dominions and the United Kingdom. We consult together here; we take certain resolutions, and it is more the policy of the Empire which is under consideration here and is being discussed than any executive matters which could be taken by this Conference itself.

Dr. FINDLAY : You see why it is made advisory to the Secretary of State if you look at Condition 5; it is merely as an avenue of information to the different States.

Mr. MALAN : Yes. But why should they not be advisory to the Prime Ministers of the Dominions? Why should this Committee, which is a Committee of this Conference, or which is stated in paragraph 3 to be a Committee of this Conference, be advisory to one partner only—that is to say, to the Secretary of State of the United Kingdom? The other Dominions will get a communication through the Secretary of State, but the advice will be given to only one of the partners sitting round this table; and if our views are not to be represented by the responsible Minister, the Prime Minister sitting at this same table, but by one we have to nominate, and he is going to dictate to us out in the Dominions what our policy is to be on any particular subject, we will certainly object.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : That is not so. There cannot be any dictation. It can only be suggested, and has to be assented to by our respective Governments before anything can be given effect to.

The CHAIRMAN : It was for that reason I did not suggest that it should be advisory to the Dominions; I thought the proposal would have still less chance of success if it were suggested that it was to be advisory to the Dominion Governments.

Mr. MALAN : Yes, but this proposal in condition 2 will tend to still further lower the status of the Dominions as compared with that of the United Kingdom.

The CHAIRMAN : No.

Mr. FISHER : Hardly that, surely?

The CHAIRMAN : That was certainly not the intention.