

Sir EDWARD MORRIS: I favour the principle of the resolution with the proposed amendment making it clear what it is intended to cover.

Mr. BURNS: As Dr. Findlay suggested in his opening remarks, the subject is almost severely technical, and although we might agree on the principle, the sentiment, of the resolution, he and succeeding speakers have admitted that it would be somewhat difficult to find a practical method of applying the principle in the resolution. We in the Mother Country endorse that view, and the South African representative has to a great extent expressed our minds upon it. There is not a great deal of this desertion, I am glad to say, in the Dominions by British husbands and fathers, and I do not think there is a great deal in Britain of desertion of wives and children by Dominion parents and husbands. If it were possible to adopt this resolution, it is one of those counsels of perfection that, given we could easily enforce it, would be desirable for us to entertain and apply; but I am guided in this matter, not being a lawyer, by the experience and advice of the various Departments. My Department, which has more children and women and more deserted wives and children under it than any other Department in this country, is under the impression that it would be very difficult to enforce, and that the cost of so doing would be disproportionate to the benefit that might accrue, and that view is shared by the Board of Trade and the Local Government Board for Ireland. It is also shared by the Home Office.

The only branch of the Imperial Government at home that looks upon this resolution with some degree of sympathy is the Scotch Local Government Board, and they of course admit, as Scotsmen always do when they are confronted with difficulties such as this, that it is a very very difficult matter to deal with. We are under the impression that injustice might be done, or at least we did think injustice might be done, if it was intended to apply this to putative fathers and to bastardy and maintenance orders for illegitimate children, and I am very pleased to see that Dr. Findlay applies it only to desertion of wives and children by their husbands and fathers. Even on that we are rather reluctant to encourage Boards of Guardians in very rare cases to embark upon litigation over long periods and over very long distances, that probably would not secure many deterrent examples, but which would certainly give a great deal of work to the law officers in the Dominions and the Mother Country over a small number of cases, and we think that it is one of those difficulties of a great Empire, it is one of those disadvantages that big aggregations of people must always have whilst they have erring spirits amongst them, and we were inclined rather not to press for any legal remedy for the difficulty that has been outlined. But I think it would be possible—and I hope Dr. Findlay will be content with it—if the subject were remitted to the law officers of the various Governments to consider the practicability of such reciprocation as is indicated by the resolution: how it can be carried into effect, how by way of the circular suggested by the South African representative you could bring the views of the Dominions before the Home Government in a more technical and more direct way than the resolution has done, and I should be only too pleased with the assistance of Mr. Harcourt to discuss with the Home law officers as to whether this very difficult subject might perhaps be met in another way—that is, should desertion of wife and children either in a Dominion or in the Mother Country be regarded as a deportable offence? and get their views upon it.

I would ask Dr. Findlay to be content with putting forward his resolution and allow Mr. Harcourt and myself and the other Departments of the Home Government to discuss with the law officers of the various Dominions as to the best way in which what is proper and just and fair in the resolution might be given practical effect to. But on the present information we have we are under the impression that unless it is made a deportable offence it will lead to extraordinary expenditure which is disproportionate to the benefit that is gained. I would ask Dr. Findlay to adopt the suggestion, with all courtesy, which I have put forward.

Dr. FINDLAY: May I, just to obviate a misunderstanding, say a word? The chief purpose which Sir Joseph Ward and myself had in supporting this resolution is as follows: At present a wife in New Zealand whose husband deserts her and comes to England is practically without a remedy. Under the law as it stands she has to find a sum of about 150*l.* before the police will move to bring him back. In effect that means that a deserted wife is without a