

solely for the transaction of business. It may therefore be said that an Imperial Council for the discussion of matters which concern alike the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies has grown into existence by a natural process. In the opinion of His Majesty's Government it might be well to discard the title of "Colonial Conferences," which imperfectly expresses the facts, and to speak of these meetings in future as meetings of the "Imperial Council." They desire, without pressing it, to make this suggestion for the consideration of the colonial Governments.

13. The Secretary of State for the Colonies would represent His Majesty's Government. India, whenever her interests required it, would also be represented. The other members of the Council would be the Prime Ministers of the colonies represented at the Conference of 1902, or, if any Prime Ministers should be unable to attend, representatives appointed for that purpose by their Governments.

The permanent body of the Imperial Council would be thus formed, but, as in 1902, their consultations could be assisted, when necessary for special purposes, by other Ministers belonging either to the Imperial or to the colonial Governments.

14. Upon these points His Majesty's Government would be glad to have the opinion of the colonial Governments. It would probably be desirable that the future composition of the Imperial Council should be one of the subjects for discussion at the approaching ordinary Conference to be held in the summer of 1906.

15. His Majesty's Government doubt whether it would be wise or necessary to give by any instrument to this Council a more formal character, to define more closely its constitution, or to attempt to delimit its functions. The history of Anglo-Saxon institutions, such as Parliament or the Cabinet system, seems to show that an institution may often be wisely left to develop in accordance with circumstances and, as it were, of its own accord, and that it is well not to sacrifice elasticity of power of adaptation to premature definiteness of form. There is every reason for confidence that the meetings of the Imperial Council (if this name prove to be acceptable to the colonial Governments) will promote unity both in sentiment and action of the States which, together with the Crown colonies and dependencies, constitute the British Empire, and it may be said, without exaggeration, that upon this unity the peace and the welfare of a large part of the world depend.

16. His Majesty's Government now desire to make a suggestion to which they attach considerable importance, for the consideration of the colonial Governments.

17. It is obvious that the Prime Ministers of the colonies, when they come to London for these meetings, cannot remain there for long, on account of their important duties at home. It is therefore desirable that subjects which they may agree to discuss should be as much as possible prepared beforehand by a body on which they would be represented, and should be presented to them in as concise and clear a form and with as much material for forming a judgment as possible.

In questions of defence this work is already done by the Imperial Defence Committee, on which also His Majesty's Government desire to obtain from time to time the presence of colonial representatives. The present proposal relates, therefore, not to defence questions, but to those of a civil character.

18. Again, it would be useful that there should be such a body in permanent existence to which the Imperial Council at their meetings could refer questions for subsequent examination and report. A reference of this kind might, for instance, have been made to such a body, if it had existed, by the Colonial Conference of 1897 with regard to the questions mentioned above (paragraph 6).

19. Or, to take more recent instances, resolutions were passed at the Colonial Conference of 1902 with regard to the state of the laws affecting shipping, to the position of the mail-services between different parts of the Empire, and to questions of freight charges and the securing of suitable steamers for Imperial service in time of war. Resolutions were also passed in favour of the adoption of some system for the protection of patents in the various parts of the Empire, of the adoption of the metric system of weights and measures for use within the Empire, and of a cheaper postage within the Empire.

20. In most of the cases the very form of the resolution indicated the need for subsequent inquiry into facts, and into the best practical means of carrying into effect the principles expressed, and obviously the Colonial Conference itself had neither the time nor the means to make such inquiry. Whether it should be made and how it should be made was, in fact, left to the discretion of each Government.

21. His Majesty's Government desire to express their opinion that it would have greatly conduced to acceleration of business and to the utility of the work done by the Conference if there had then been in existence a permanent Commission, representing all the States concerned, to which in each case the Conference could have directly referred the task of examining facts and reporting as to the best way of carrying out the principles laid down.

22. In addition to those already mentioned, other questions will readily occur in which it is desirable to harmonize, so far as possible, the legislation of the United Kingdom and the colonies. Sometimes in matters of joint concern an attempt has been made to arrange an *ad hoc* Conference containing representatives of the several States interested. But this is found in practice to be difficult to effect, and there has to be much correspondence and loss of time before such a Committee can be brought together.

23. Both in the United Kingdom and in the colonies, when questions arise in regard to which Governments and Parliaments require more light and knowledge before taking action, it is usual to appoint Royal Commissions or departmental committees to inquire into the subject and to suggest solutions. His Majesty's Government desire to submit for consideration the proposal that His Majesty should be advised to appoint a Commission of a more permanent kind to discharge the same functions in regard to questions of joint concern. The Commission would only act upon references made either by the Imperial Council at their meetings or at any time by His Majesty's Government together with one or more of the colonial Governments. Its functions would be of a