

23 May, 1911.]

PUBLICITY OF PROCEEDINGS.

[1st Day.]

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

tive is doing at these Conferences as well as, of course, the people in the other portions of the oversea Dominions have the right to know what is going on so far as their representatives are concerned; and it was that difficulty that arose and that caused a good deal of friction for a time in New Zealand itself. I am anxious, as the representative of that country, to prevent a repetition of that state of affairs, and to see that a proper knowledge of what is taking place at this Conference is afforded through the Press of New Zealand for the information of the public there. The proceedings of this Conference from day to day should be reported.

I want it to be perfectly understood that I am not reflecting on any of the official staff or on the men connected with the Press organizations. It is to the system I am referring, which, in my opinion, was responsible for the situation to which I have just alluded. I think that we might with very great advantage, so far as my judgment goes, allow the general work of the Conference to be open to the Press, except the more important portions which may be regarded as confidential; those we should deal with in Committee, and no public record should be taken of the proceedings in such matters.

Sir, I move the resolution, notice of which I have given.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Mr. Asquith, the subject which is now brought forward to the attention of the Conference by my friend Sir Joseph Ward engaged at some length the attention of the last Conference. Opinions were divided upon this point, but finally the majority came to the conclusion that it would not be advisable to have the Press admitted to the sittings of this Conference, and the resolution which was finally carried was that a record should be taken of what is said here, and a *précis* given to the Press every day.

I may observe to Sir Joseph Ward that the people of New Zealand, so far as the proceedings of this Conference took place from day to day, were as well informed as the people of London, or the people of Australia, or the people of Canada. Perhaps in Australia or in Canada they may have had a little more information, because there were enterprising journalists, newspaper men, who undertook to comment and to get what information they could, and sent it to their respective papers, both in the capital here in London and the respective Dominions to which they belonged. The rule, as adopted, worked fairly well. I am sorry I did not then agree with Sir Joseph Ward. Like all rules, it was not carried quite unanimously; the words used by Sir Joseph Ward show that it was not carried with unanimity, but I think, on the whole, the majority was satisfied with the result.

For my part, I would see very great objections on broad principles to have the Press admitted, because it would be practically admitting the public to these Conferences. The moment the Press is here the whole public is admitted, and the discussion which takes place—I was going to use the word negotiations, and I think that would not be out of place—the deliberations, at all events—would, I am afraid, if the public were admitted from day to day, fall immediately into the domain, I will not say of party politics, but at all events of public discussion. If these Conferences are to have any good result (and I am sure they will) we are all agreed as to this point. I think it better that we should keep to this Conference the character of a Conference—that is to say, of deliberation, discussion, negotiation, trying to get a unanimous conclusion upon all the questions which are debated. We are all one here, and Mr. Asquith very properly said that when we cross this threshold we leave party politics behind. We leave all party spirit behind. As British subjects we are discussing Imperial questions, and we cannot hope that upon each subject, as on any other subject, we can be unanimous. There must be differences of opinion, and the object of this Conference is, upon all these questions, to try to come to a unanimous conclusion. If we are, therefore, to reach this goal which would inspire us upon all questions that come forward, I think we must do as is done in all these matters, preserve the secrecy of these deliberations, and give not the differences of opinion which may exist here, but the unanimous conclusion which is reached, and for these reasons, for my own part, if Sir Joseph Ward presses his motion to a conclusion, I should have to vote against it.

Mr. FISHER: Mr. Asquith, I have a great deal of sympathy with the point that the Press should hear all the debates, although there are many sub-