

2nd Day.]

RECONSTITUTION OF THE COLONIAL OFFICE.

[25 May, 1911.]

Sir JOSEPH WARD : They could make recommendations.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : I would be very chary for my part of having a recommendation which would be suitable to one section and not suitable to another.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : Then you need not act upon that.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : But if you have a recommendation sent to you and you do not act upon it, you give a weapon at once to somebody to attack you upon it. There is such a position in Canada. I do not know that there is one in New Zealand, but I would not like a Committee to pass and send to us a resolution which we could not act on. Take a concrete case. Take the Asiatic question : there is no more difficult question than that to deal with. The Home Government has views upon this question which perhaps we do not entertain. They have difficulties in India which they must take cognisance of, but we have difficulties in our countries also. You have questions of this kind debated by this Committee, and they pass a resolution and send it to you and me and Mr. Fisher, calling for either administrative or legislative action which for my part I would not like to take, perhaps, or it might be suitable to you and not suitable to another. I do not see clearly what good point could be served. I see very clearly what adverse point might be made.

The PRESIDENT : Those are very wide considerations. All I wanted to make clear is that we do not propose that a question which only arises between the United Kingdom and one Dominion would, under any circumstances, come within the cognisance of this Committee.

Dr. FINDLAY : Mr. Harcourt pointed out that, unless there was unanimity, the recommendation would not have any effect. I suggest that with regard to certain matters on the present agenda paper unanimity might be arrived at by such a Committee as suggested, and thus save the work of the whole Conference.

Mr. BRODEUR : That is under the organization arranged at the last Conference, which provided for a subsidiary Conference.

The PRESIDENT : And we had one last year.

Mr. HARCOURT : This is more in the nature of a continued subsidiary Conference on Conference matters.

Mr. FISHER : These recommendations seem to cover two points—a more efficient arrangement of business by the Secretary of State's Office with regard to the overseas Dominions, and the status of the High Commissioners of the Dominions, who represent their Governments in London. The duties and functions of a High Commissioner, so far as they relate to the Government of the United Kingdom, are very much of a dual kind, and no one can say where they begin and end. My own view is that a High Commissioner is a useful officer here. Canada is more fortunate than Australia in regard to distance. We are far away, and although we have the same means of communication by wire, it is a very much longer time before the Governments there can see despatches with the details of any matters of importance. Our High Commissioners are a much more convenient channel. If we more fully inform them, they can, as the representatives of the Dominions here, discuss all the matters of detail which you would not like to put in a despatch for record and reference, and inform the responsible Ministers of the United Kingdom as to the views of the Governments of the overseas Dominions on any particular matter.