

25 May, 1911.] RECONSTITUTION OF THE COLONIAL OFFICE.

[2nd Day.]

The PRESIDENT—*cont.*

frequent and direct touch with the Secretary of State of the Imperial Government; but that does not really affect the question of the Committee, and when I ventured rather to press Mr. Fisher to give me a definite opinion about that Committee I could see he was not very much enamoured of it.

Mr. FISHER: It is not usual to put heat into a matter which is purely a consultative matter, but I was asking Sir Joseph Ward whether it would not meet the view he holds and the view the Conference holds to say that the Government should co-operate and give access to the High Commissioner on matters that may concern the Dominion prior to a decision being come to wherever possible—something on the lines of a general recommendation.

The PRESIDENT: That, of course, is a rather different point from the question of whether it is desirable that there should be such a Committee as has been suggested.

Mr. FISHER: I do not think Sir Joseph Ward wishes to press for a Committee.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I hope the Conference will not abandon this proposed Committee. I want to make the position quite clear to the members of the Conference who are here from the overseas Dominions. This Committee, as I understand, has nothing whatever to do with the ordinary communication with any department of our States, or any communications through the Governors. We are here to-day sitting at this Conference. When this Conference is over, then with regard to any matters upon which resolutions are passed, or upon which strong views have been expressed, which are recorded in the proceedings, there is no connecting link in the shape of a bridge between this Conference and the time when we meet again four years from now. This Conference will have done its part all right, but there is nothing, as I say, in the shape of a bridge to carry its business on until we meet again. This proposed Committee would deal with resolutions arrived at by the Conference, and deal with proposals which may come up between the holding of this Conference and the next one. I therefore regard it as of very great importance that we should have this Standing Committee on the lines proposed by Mr. Harcourt, and I only make the reservation that I should like a little time for more consideration with regard to the question of whether the High Commissioner could with appropriateness act on such Committee; but I certainly think there should be a Committee. Keeping the point clear as to how the communications are to be made I would ask any members of the Conference to look at the records of the past Imperial Conference. If the record is looked at one cannot help being struck by the fact that some of the proposals we have assented to have not resulted in any practical good in the strict sense of the term. Take the very matter which Mr. Fisher alluded to on the first day of this Conference meeting here. There was no resolution passed at the Conference of 1907 upon the question of the Suez Canal dues, but strong representations were made, both by Mr. Deakin and myself, upon that particular point. I am not saying that the absence of any action is a matter that the British Government have not complete justification for, but I do say that between 1907 and now, if we had the opportunity of putting forward through a Committee any matter that had been dealt with at the past Conference it could have been considered and discussed with the British Government, and some preparatory information probably made available for use at this present Conference upon the same matter. I look upon this suggestion as very important. We should have through the agency of this Standing Committee a bridge between two Conferences. If I understand the position correctly there is no such point coming before this suggested Committee as, for instance, any individual representation upon the matter of the Declaration of London. I do not see how that would be remitted to such a Committee for consideration at all. I for one should object to it. I think such a matter requires to be dealt with between the respective Government and the British Government and it is not a matter to be relegated for consideration by the High Commissioner on behalf of his Government.

Mr. PEARCE: Do not you think the High Commissioner would be a ready means of finding out what the Colonies thought on a question?