

IMPERIAL CONFERENCE, 1911.

DOMINIONS No. 8.

PAPERS LAID BEFORE THE CONFERENCE.

(I.)

Publication of Proceedings.

MEMORANDUM.

The following resolution is proposed to be submitted to the Imperial Conference by the Government of New Zealand :—

“That the Conference be open to the Press, except when the subjects are Confidential.”

The precedents in recent years in the matter of publication are as follows :—

- (a) In the case of the Colonial Conference of 1902 (and the Defence Conference of 1909) there were published only resolutions or results and a selection of speeches and memoranda, the actual proceedings being kept confidential.
- (b) In the case of the Colonial Conference of 1907 it was arranged at the beginning of the Conference that a *précis* of the proceedings should be issued daily to the Press, after revision by members of the matter which concerned them. The question of publication was deferred nearly to the end of the Conference, and it was then decided to publish the full text of the proceedings and the papers laid before the Conference except in so far as they were held by the Conference to be confidential.

There is no precedent for the admission of the Press to the meetings of the Conference.

In 1907 Mr. Deakin ([Cd. 3523], pp. 19-20) expressed the view that it was advisable to keep the public in close touch with the Conference, and that the Press might safely be admitted to most of the discussions. This course did not, however, commend itself to the Conference. It was stated by Sir Wilfrid Laurier ([Cd. 3523], page 19) that if the proceedings were published from day to day “there might perhaps arise a premature discussion on certain matters.” Lord Elgin also stated ([Cd. 3523], page 19) that “it would be inexpedient to publish day by day. After all, this must partake largely of the character of a confidential discussion across the table. . . . the ordinary course of the procedure will be surely confidential and conversational discussion across this table, and therefore I think it is essential that each member of the Conference should have not only an opportunity of seeing but of revising the report of what he has said.”

On the other hand, some members of the Conference, notably Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Joseph Ward, expressed the view that course (a) above stated would not be satisfactory, on the ground that the information published in accordance with it was very meagre and of little use in informing the public.

The result of the discussion was the unanimous adoption of course (b), which was judged to have the advantage of keeping the public acquainted with the Conference as it proceeded, and at the same time of eventually affording opportunities for full acquaintance with the proceedings of the Conference, so far as this was possible without risk to the interests of the State.