

it. Two years ago this Conference, with the exception of the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, agreed that the rights of Indians domiciled in parts of the Empire other than India should be recognized. Sir Tej now proposes that the question how and when effect can be given to this agreement should be made the subject of inquiry and discussion between committees representing the several Governments concerned and a committee representing the Government of India.

Limitation of Indian Request.

That is what Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru asks. But before I proceed I must also invite you to note that there are various matters already settled which he is not attempting to reopen. He does not question the right of each community in the British Commonwealth to control the composition of its own population. He is not, in a word, asking the self-governing Dominions to reopen the question of Indian immigration. He frankly recognizes the autonomy of the Dominion Governments within their respective territories. What he asks is that the Governments concerned will agree to discuss with the Government of India the steps necessary to give effect to the resolution passed by the Conference in 1921. It is, of course, in the last instance for each Government to decide for itself, but, because in certain matters such decisions are not limited in their effects to the countries by which they are taken, the issues to which they relate may be brought for mutual discussion here.

British Government accepts Principle of Request.

In so far as the British Government is responsible for the colonies and protectorates, I can only say, on behalf of the British Government, that we certainly accept the principle of the request put forward by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru.

Maintenance of Kenya Settlement.

In saying this you will not understand me to mean that we are prepared to reopen matters which have been made the subject of recent and most carefully considered decision. I refer more especially to the Kenya settlement, the terms of which were placed before and accepted by the British Parliament in July. While I would not propose that the area of discussion between the contemplated committee and the Secretary of State for the Colonies should be limited, I should only be misleading India if I were to say anything to suggest that the Government could consent to reconsider the decisions embodied in the settlement of July last. To use the words of the White Paper, the constant endeavour of the British Government throughout their deliberations was to relate the principles which must govern the administration of a British colony in tropical Africa to the wider considerations of general Imperial policy as enunciated in the resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1921.

Responsibilities of British Government.

I have also to remind the representatives of India that, so far as the British colonies and protectorates are concerned, the ultimate responsibility rests with the British Government, and it is with the British Government, and more particularly with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that any questions affecting British Indians domiciled in these colonies and protectorates should be discussed in the first instance by such a committee as Sir Tej has suggested. It will then be for the Colonial Office to consult, as may be necessary, any Colonial Government concerned with these discussions before any decisions are taken by the British Government.

Political Status of Indians in Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandated Territories.

I am hopeful that the area to be covered by these discussions will not in fact prove wide. I recently circulated to members of the Conference, in response to their general wish, a memorandum* upon the political status of British Indians in the colonies, protectorates, and mandated territories. I studiously confined my memorandum to facts, and perhaps I may be permitted to summarize quite briefly what that memorandum contains.

It shows that, in the West Indian colonies, British Indians are under no political or legal disability of any kind. They have the same franchise and the same opportunities of becoming members of elective bodies as any other British subjects. The West Indian colonies in which there is a considerable British-Indian population are British Guiana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. In British Guiana and Jamaica the elective system already exists, and it will be introduced in Trinidad at an early date.

When you turn to the eastern colonies the memorandum shows that in Ceylon, under a revised constitution about to be issued, qualified British Indians will be eligible for the franchise and for election to the Legislative Council in the same manner as all other British subjects. Again, in Mauritius there is no distinction between British Indians and other British subjects as regards eligibility for the franchise.

In East Africa you will find from the memorandum that in Uganda the Legislative Council is not elective, but that there is no restriction on the number or race of the unofficial members who may be nominated to the Council: while in Tanganyika Territory there is no Legislative or Executive Council.

Subject to a clear understanding on these points, my colleagues and I cordially welcome on behalf of the British Government the proposal of the representatives of India so far as the colonies and protectorates are concerned.

* See Annex A.