

(h) THE SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION IN RELATION TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

Previous Imperial Conferences have made a number of recommendations with regard to the communication of information and the system of consultation in relation to treaty negotiations and the conduct of foreign affairs generally. The main points can be summarized as follows :—

(1) Any of His Majesty's Governments conducting negotiations should inform the other Governments of His Majesty in case they should be interested and give them the opportunity of expressing their views, if they think that their interests may be affected.

(2) Any of His Majesty's Governments on receiving such information should, if it desires to express any views, do so with reasonable promptitude.

(3) None of His Majesty's Governments can take any steps which might involve the other Governments of His Majesty in any active obligations without their definite assent.

The Conference desired to emphasize the importance of ensuring the effective operation of these arrangements. As regards the first two points, they made the following observations :—

(i) The first point—namely, that of informing other Governments of negotiations—is of special importance in relation to treaty negotiations, in order that any Government which feels that it is likely to be interested in negotiations conducted by another Government may have the earliest possible opportunity of expressing its views. The application of this is not, however, confined to treaty negotiations. It cannot be doubted that the fullest possible interchange of information between His Majesty's Governments in relation to all aspects of foreign affairs is of the greatest value to all the Governments concerned.

In considering this aspect of the matter the Conference have taken note of the development since the Imperial Conference of 1926 of the system of appointment of diplomatic representatives of His Majesty representing in foreign countries the interests of different members of the British Commonwealth. They feel that such appointments furnish a most valuable opportunity for the interchange of information not only between the representatives themselves, but also between the respective Governments.

Attention is also drawn to the resolution quoted in Section VI of the Report of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee of the Imperial Conference of 1926, with regard to the development of a system to supplement the present system of inter-communication through the official channel with reference not only to foreign affairs, but to all matters of common concern. The Conference have heard with interest the account which was given of the liaison system adopted by His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia, and recognized its value. Their attention has also been called to the action taken by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom in the appointment of representatives in Canada and the Union of South Africa. They are impressed with the desirability of continuing to develop the system of personal contact between His Majesty's Governments, though, of course, they recognize that the precise arrangements to be adopted for securing this development are matters for the consideration of the individual Governments with a view to securing a system which shall be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each Government.

(ii) As regards the second point—namely, that any of His Majesty's Governments desiring to express any views should express them with reasonable promptitude—it is clear that a negotiating Government cannot fail to be embarrassed in the conduct of negotiations if the observations of other Governments who consider that their interests may be affected are not received at the earliest possible stage in the negotiations. In the absence of comment the negotiating Government should, as indicated in the report of the 1926 Conference, be entitled to assume that no objection will be raised to its proposed policy.