

THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE OF 1907

Address by the HON. Louts PHILIPPE BRODEUR, K.C., M.P., Minister of Marine and Fisheries, Canadian Delegate to the Imperial Conference of 1907, before the Empire Club of Canada, on November 14th, 1907.

Mr. President and Gentlemen,--

The short time at my disposal, and the extensive field presented by the subject of this address, oblige me to waive all preliminary remarks save the expression of the pleasure it gives me to have the honour of speaking to the officers and members of the empire Club of Canada. The very name of your Club is an assurance for me that you take a deep interest in all matters that concern the well-being and future of the British Empire and of the young and progressive Canadian people, and I have accepted with pleasure the suggestion of addressing you on the work of the Colonial Conference--the solidarity of the interests of Great Britain and the Dominions.

Before entering upon the consideration of the important questions dealt with at the fifteen meetings of the Conference, and summarizing the proceedings and resolutions discussed, I desire to impress upon your minds the fact. that I shall view each subject from a' general standpoint. Keep, then, before you the idea of a United Empire composed of the Government of the United Kingdom and the Governments of the self-governing States. Remember that between the United Kingdom and the self-governing Dominions of the Empire there exists a solidarity of interest so firmly established that whatsoever affects the present prosperity and future prospects of the former equally affects those of the latter, and vice versa. Consequently, in dealing with the subject, when I mention Canada alone it is clearly understood that the real and practical interests of the Empire are ever present to my mind. To summarize the vast amount of work performed by the members of the Conference would demand an entire volume. I cannot pretend to present more than a general outline. The results respectively to the whole Empire and especially to Canada will have to be read in the records of the prosperity and achievements of the coming years. I shall now ask your attention while I touch briefly, but as clearly and logically as is possible for me, upon the four questions of paramount importance:

- (1) Constitution of the Conference.
- (2) Military Defence, divided into (a) Land Defence. (b) Naval Defence.
- (3) The "All Red Line."
- (4) Preferential Trade.

(1) Doubtless you have noticed that these Conferences have always, in the past, been styled " Colonial Conferences." During the first, second, third and fourth days of the Conference of last April the title by which this Assembly of Representatives from the different sections of the empire was in future to be known, the constitution thereof for all time to come, and the machinery to be adopted in its organization, were all fully discussed, and the result of the deliberations embodied in a Resolution which reads thus

"That it will be to the advantage of the Empire if a Conference, to be called the Imperial Conference, is held every four years, at which questions of common interest may be discussed and considered as between His Majesty's Government and Governments of the self-governing Dominions beyond the Seas.

"The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom will be ex-officio President, and the Prime Ministers of the self-governing Dominions ex-officio members of the Conference. The Secretary of State for the Colonies will be an ex-officio member of the Conference, and will take the chair in the absence of the President, and will arrange for such Imperial Conferences after communication with the Prime Ministers of the respective Dominions.

"Such other Ministers as the respective Governments may appoint will also be members of the Conference, it being understood that except by special permission of the Conference, each discussion will be conducted by not more than two representatives from each Government, and that each Government will have only one vote.

"That it is desirable to establish a system by which the several Governments shall be kept informed, during the periods between the Conferences, in regard to matters which have been, or may be, subjects of discussion by means of a permanent secretarial staff, charged under the direction of the Secretary of State for the Colonies."

There is also in that Resolution another paragraph dealing with the calling of Conferences between two or more Governments. I have not time to touch upon the various phases of the three days' discussion which led up to the adoption of this Resolution. I shall try, however, to give you as briefly as possible the nature of the principles embodied in that Resolution: (2) Change of title from " Colonial Conference " to " Imperial Conference;" (a) The placing of the Prime Minister of Great Britain instead of the Secretary of State for the Colonies as the directing spirit of the Conference; (3) Changing the status of the representatives of the self-governing Dominions from that of subordinates dealing with an official of a superior power to that of Government dealing with Government on a footing of equality; (4) Replacing of the title of " Colonies " by that of " Dominions "; (5) The appointment of representatives from the Dominions other than the Prime Ministers; (6) The creation of a branch of the Colonial Office to deal with matters concerning the self-governing Dominions.

Behind all these changes looms up the strongest guarantee of the permanency of our political autonomy and legislative liberty that the Constitution has ever granted to us. I would like to unfold all the details of that historical discussion, but I am afraid that I shall have to confine myself to a mere sketch of those details. First, as to the change of title. Previous Conferences, as well as the last one, have been called at the instigation and by the authority of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, inviting certain members of the self-governing Colonies to meet him and discuss with him the relations existing between the Colonial Office and the Governments of the Colonies. It was the action of the superior power desiring to confer with its subordinates. He selected himself those who were to be members of the Conference, and did not leave to the Colonies the right to select their representatives. Those Conferences were virtually Colonial in their range of view, and could not be considered as being of an Imperial nature. The Conferences of the future!, by virtue of the Resolution which I have just read, are to be no more Colonial but Imperial Conferences. They will not be presided over by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, but the Prime Minister of Great Britain will be the guiding spirit of those meetings, and it is only in his absence that the Secretary of State for the Colonies will preside. The Dominions will have the right to select their own representatives, and in other words, instead of having a meeting of the Colonial Department with subordinate officers, it will be a meeting of Government with Governments. It will be the meeting of the Government of the United Kingdom and the Governments of the self-governing Dominions. Just at the opening of the Conference, after the Prime Ministers had been welcomed by the Chairman, Lord Elgin invited the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to address the Conference. In the course of his remarks the British Premier said

" I should like to observe at this point--and (here is sometimes, apparently, in the minds of men a mistake on this subject--that this is not a conference between the Premiers and the Colonial Secretary, but between the Premiers and members of the Government under the Presidency of the Secretary of State for Colonies, which is a very different matter. In regard to questions of military defence, for instance, the Secretary of State for War will come and confer with you, and the First Lord of the Admiralty in the same way will be present when naval questions are discussed."

It is true, as the Prime Minister then said, that there was some misapprehension as to the constitution of the Conference, but we must not forget that this was due entirely to the way in which the invitation had been drafted. The suggestion which he made was certainly a step in the right direction. It raised at once the status of the Colonial representatives in the scab that makes for greater equality between all parties, but I think the situation was perfectly well represented when the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, speaking after Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, said: "This Conference is not, as I understand it (I give my own views), a Conference simply of the Prime Ministers of the different self-governing Colonies and the Secretary of State, but it is, if I may give my own mind, a Conference between Government and Governments; it is a Conference between

the Imperial Government and the Governments of the self-governing Colonies of England."

This idea expressed by the Canadian Prime Minister was embodied in the Resolution, which led us away from the idea of subordinates dealing with a master towards the higher and more inspiring conception of the principle of liberty-enjoying Colonies of the Empire acting in harmony with the Mother Country on a footing of constitutional equality. The advisability of the creation of an Imperial Conference having been decided upon, there remained the question of the personnel of the Conference. All the Prime Ministers of the British empire will, ex-officio, be members of the Conference, and besides, each Government, whether Imperial or State Government, will have the right to appoint representatives. It is true that formerly representatives of the different Governments were permitted to attend, but they were permitted to speak only when questions affecting the different Departments with which they were concerned were under discussion. The necessity was felt also that the work of the Conference should be continued during the Recess by the creation of a Secretariat that would collect information of general interest to the different parts of the Empire.

I have not yet been able to see the measure which has been discussed before the British Parliament by Lord Elgin in the month of August last on the organization of the Secretariat, but from the imperfect report I have received of those proceedings and of the speech of Lord Elgin, I see that the officers of that Secretariat will devote in the future all their time to the consideration of the affairs concerning the self-governing Dominions. I fully realize that it will be in the interest of the Colonial Office, as well as of the self-governing Dominions, that their relations with the Imperial Government will be conducted exclusively by officers, or by a branch of that Department, having nothing to do with the administration of the Crown Colonies. The principles under which the self-governing Dominions and the Crown Colonies are administered are so different that it is very much to be desired that these two administrations should be as separate as possible. The Resolution passed by the Conference and the organization proposed by Lord Elgin will be certainly accepted with great satisfaction by the self-governing Dominions.

Considerable debate was raised with regard to the word " Dominion," and as to whether the time had not arrived when the self-governing Colonies should cease to be called "self-governing Colonies," but rather "self-governing Dominions or States." In the invitation which had been issued by Mr. Lyttelton for the calling of the Conference which has just taken place, it had been suggested that these Conferences should be called " Imperial Councils." The Canadian Government took exception to that title because it would not have upheld the autonomy of the various self-governing Dominions as does the idea of a Conference. It was too formal, and it might, perhaps, at a future date, exercise powers which would properly belong to the self-governing Dominions. The basic principle of a United

empire with perfectly independent component parts is guaranteed beyond all future question. This Dominion of ours steps into her proper place amongst the nations of the world, proud of her British connection, and proud of her own nationhood.

The next subject taken up by the Conference was that of Imperial Defence. This was divided into (a) Land Defence and (b) Naval Defence. The principal feature of the discussion on Land Defence consisted of an able and lengthy address by Mr. Haldane, Secretary of State for War, and the Resolution finally adopted by the Conference. Mr. Haldane said: " My main purpose in addressing the Conference is to suggest for your acceptance the opinion that the General Staff which we have created at home, and which is in its infancy, should receive as far as possible an Imperial character. I will define what I mean. It is not that we wish in the slightest degree even to suggest that you should bow your heads to any direction from home in military matters, but the General Staff Officer would have as his function this--trained in a common school, recruited, it may be, from the most varying parts of the empire, but trained according to common principles--he would be at the disposition of the local Commander-in-Chief, whether he were Canadian, British, or Australian, or New Zealander, or South African, for giving advice and furnishing information based upon the highest military study of the time."

There was certainly no objection to any proposition of this kind, because it gives to our military organization the benefit of the studies of men who have spent their lives in the study of military matters, and at the same time it maintained the absolute freedom which the country has always been asking concerning military control--the control of its organization and control of its expenditure. Here is the Resolution, which was carried unanimously

"That this Conference, without wishing to commit to immediate action any of the Governments represented at it, recognizes and affirms the need of developing throughout the Empire the conception of a General Staff recruited from the forces of the empire as a whole, which shall be the means of fostering the study of military science in the various branches, shall collect and disseminate to the various Governments military information and intelligence, shall undertake the preparation of schemes of defence on a common principle, and without in the least interfering in questions connected with command and administration, shall at the request of the respective Governments advise them as to the training, education and organization of the military forces of the Crown in every part of the Empire."

You will note that upon every question touching military defence this Dominion has come out absolutely free and unrestrained by any laws other than those of her own creation. In addition we have the assistance of an advisory body to assist in perfecting our military education, and not only is no compulsion to be

exercised in our regard, but most important assistance is to be granted us in the acquirement of military knowledge and information.

Naval Defence--Somehow or other the idea got abroad that Canada has never done anything by way of assistance in Imperial Naval Defence. I know not: whence this false impression arose, but certainly it has existed, and like all wrong impressions it has found its way into many circles. In 1902 Canada expressed the idea that on this question, as on all other questions, we should be free to act the way the Canadian people liked. The suggestion was then made of a contribution in money to the British Navy. It was represented on the part of Canada that this would be against the principle of our control of public expenditure, and contrary to the principle of responsible government. The other Colonies represented at the Conference of 1902 were disposed to take a rather different view, and were willing to accept the suggestion and make the direct contribution. I am glad to see, however, that after four years' experience two of the Colonies then represented (Australia and New Zealand) have been urging the advisability of changing their policy of 1902, and of accepting the one then propounded by Canada. At the last Conference all were willing to contribute to the defence of the Empire; there was only a difference of opinion as to the means by which this defence could be carried out.

It was a source of gratification for us to find out that the stand taken then by the Canadian Government on this question was being recognized as the best by the two great Dominions of Australia and New Zealand. As Minister of Marine, the duty devolved upon me of explaining the Canadian attitude. A document had been laid before us showing what had been spent upon Naval Defence by the United Kingdom and by the self-governing Dominions, but when it came to speak of Canada, it simply said nothing had been contributed to Naval Defence. I undertook then to prove and establish that this document did not represent exactly the situation, and am glad and happy to say that after I had given my explanation, Lord Tweedmouth, First Lord of the Admiralty, was kind enough recently, in the House of Lords, to recognize absolutely the soundness of our contention, namely, that we had done a great deal for the defence of the Empire by looking after our local naval defence.

As an erroneous view of this matter may perhaps exist also in Canada, I may be permitted to say in a few words what we have done in that connection. In 1818 Great Britain, the Mother Country, made a Treaty with the United States, by which the United States fishermen were permitted to come and fish in Canadian waters. American fishermen were given rights and privileges of a very extraordinary nature, and concerning which Canada had no remedy. This Treaty was never submitted to Canada, and there was really very good reason for that, because we had then no responsible government. We were to all intents and purposes a Crown Colony, though we had legislative representation. It became necessary to have vessels to carry out the provisions of this Treaty, and to prevent American fishermen from violating them. The British Admiralty had to

send out vessels to protect those fisheries, and to have the Treaty respected. This was surely an Imperial obligation, since it was incurred in virtue of a Treaty between Great Britain and the United States without the consent of Canada.

Which country is now looking after the protection of the fisheries, and carrying out the Imperial obligation? We ourselves, the Canadian people, are carrying the burden, and carrying it gladly. Since the abrogation of the Treaty of Washington Canada has spent for that service \$3,147,990. Last year we spent more than \$250,000, and this year we are spending \$500,000, including the construction of a cruiser. Surely this is a contribution to Imperial Naval Defence. Then we have our Great Lakes—really inland seas—that have to be protected. We have to protect our fisheries there. Who did that work formerly? The British Navy. Who are doing it today? The Canadian Government. In regard to our Fisheries Protection Service, we acquired a cruiser some years ago, manned entirely by Canadian seamen. This cruiser is in itself a Naval Training School for our young men. Not only have we assumed control of the above services formerly controlled by the British Admiralty, but we are doing the same in regard to other matters. We have established wireless telegraph stations on the Atlantic coast, and are about to construct some on the Pacific coast. The expenditure in connection with wireless telegraphy is under the control of the Admiralty and included in its general budget. It was included in the statement of money spent for the British Navy, yet what we spend on it in Canada is not generally included in the amount given as our part of our Naval expenditure. The Hydrographic surveys along our coasts and our rivers were made by the British Authorities. We have taken over that Survey.

Since the first of January last the Halifax Dockyard has been under the management of the Canadian Government, and very soon the Esquimalt Dockyard will also be administered by the Canadian Government. Whatever sums these Dockyards cost the Admiralty we assume as a charge. All these are contributions to the Naval Defence of the Empire. I might also mention the widening and deepening of the St. Lawrence for the safety of vessels plying on those waters, which are mostly British vessels. We provide for the lighting of the coasts and rivers with all the most perfect modern appliances. We have established recently at Cape Race, in Newfoundland (which is a British Colony) a light which has no equal in the world. In England they have light dues to pay, while Canada places those safeguards free of cost. Is all this not a contribution to the protection of the British Navy, because most of the vessels plying in those waters are British vessels? I am happy to say that this expression of views which I gave before the Conference is thoroughly in accord with that expressed by Sir Charles Tupper in an article published in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, of May, 1907. This article shows that on that question there are not two opinions amongst the political parties in Canada, but that we are absolutely in accord. Here is what Sir Charles Tupper says

"It is known that from the outset I have felt the interests of Canada and the true interests of the Empire to be opposed to the demand for Colonial contributions to the Imperial Navy. Those loudest in that demand admit that a voice in administration by the Colony contributing is essential, and all the naval experts concur in the opinion that any divisions of authority would be fatal. But this is not for one moment to say that each Colony should not contribute to the extent of its ability to the defence of the Empire. I hold strongly that it should, and I maintain that Canada has discharged that duty in the manner most conducive to Imperial interests Canada protects her fisheries by her own cruisers, and when the Imperial Government expressed a wish to be relieved of the expense of maintaining the strategic points at the harbours of Halifax and Esquimalt, the Canadian Government at once relieved them of that large expenditure, amounting to £185,000 per annum, and assumed it themselves. The Empire can be best defended by strengthening its weakest part."

Some views were expressed by the Representative from the Cape to have the Colony committed to the idea of contributing to the British Navy, but I may say that such an expression of views did not find an echo: in the great majority of the States which were represented at the Conference. Once more on this subject, as on that of land defence, and in connection with the constitution of the Conference, Canada emerged successful, and in a manner that cannot but help materially in her future progress and prosperity.

All Red-Line--The Imperial Conference of 1907 will go down in history as the pioneer of the idea of establishing a fast-line service connecting the different parts of the Empire through Canadian territory. The idea was received with a great deal of enthusiasm in this country, and it was also well received in the different parts of the empire interested. Several times during the proceedings of the Conference allusion was made to this idea of establishing direct communication, by which the mails and passengers for the different parts of the Empire could be carried by this route. Sir Wilfrid Laurier was the one who drafted the Resolution which was finally adopted by the Conference, and which reads as follows

"That in the opinion of this Conference the interests of the empire demand that in so far as possible its different portions should be connected by the best possible means of mail communication, travel and transportation; that to this end it is advisable that Great Britain should be connected with Canada, and through Canada with Australia and New Zealand, by the best service available within reasonable cost; that for the purpose of carrying the above project into effect, such financial support as may be necessary should be contributed by Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in equitable proportions."

I have no time to analyze the debate that took place before this Resolution was adopted. I am happy to say, however, that the general tone of the discussion was very favourable. It is a great idea which might do more for the connecting of the

different links of the British Empire than anything which has been done in the past. The subject is now engaging the consideration of the different Governments concerned, and I hope that the British Government will do as much for this as they have done for connecting the United States and England. The days are not far away when the British mail route between North America and England was through Canada. It was at the time that the British Government was subsidizing the Canadian mail route. Since that time, however, it has been found advisable by the British Authorities to give their subsidies to a route having New York for its terminal point on this

side of the Atlantic, but in view of the development we have made in bringing trade from the West over our Canadian routes, by our Great Lakes and by the St. Lawrence, it is to be expected that our efforts for the development of commercial relations between Canada and Great Britain will be recognized, and that a subsidy will be given that will assure the construction of this "all red route," and thus closely connect the different parts of the Empire.

Preference--No question before the Conference entailed more discussion than that of Preference. At one time it seemed as though this discussion would render the proceedings less harmonious than any discussion which had previously taken place. There was, perhaps, in connection with that debate more party feeling exhibited than in any previous discussion, but I would not like to express any arbitrary views as to that. A mandate had been given by the people of Great Britain some two years ago to its Government in favour of free trade, and the Government of today had to carry out that mandate. We have certainly no right to complain as to the attitude of the people of Great Britain, as they have no right to complain if, in framing our fiscal policy, we think advisable to impose duties higher or lower upon their goods. If we deserve to have, as far as fiscal autonomy is concerned, perfect freedom, it is only fair that we should allow to the people of Great Britain the same freedom as to their fiscal policy. Of course it was the duty of the representatives of the self-governing Dominions to urge the advisability of having preference within the different parts of the Empire. We fully realize the difficulties there are in the way, but it was at the same time our duty to try to remove those difficulties, or, at least, to give an expression of our views, and the following Resolution was adopted to that effect

"That this Conference recognizes that the principle of Preferential trade between the United Kingdom and His Majesty's Dominions beyond the Seas would stimulate and facilitate mutual intercourse, and would, by promoting the development of the resources and industries of the several parts, strengthen the Empire. (a) That this Conference recognizes that, in the present circumstances of the Colonies, it is not practicable to adopt a general system of free trade as between the Mother Country and the British Dominions beyond the Seas. (3) That with a view, however, to promoting the increase of trade within the empire, it is desirable that those Colonies which have not already adopted such a policy should, as far as their circumstances permit, give substantial preferential

treatment to the products and manufactures of the United Kingdom. (q.) That the Prime Ministers of the Colonies respectively urge on His Majesty's Government the expediency of granting in the United Kingdom preferential treatment to the products and manufactures of the Colonies either by exemption from or reduction of duties now or hereafter imposed. (5) That the Prime Ministers present at the Conference undertake to submit to their respective Governments at the earliest opportunity the principle of the Resolution and to request them to take such measures as may be necessary to give effect to it."

There were several other questions discussed, such as Emigration, Naturalization, Judicial Appeals, Universal Penny Postage, Silver Coinage, etc., but I have already trespassed too much upon your time to deal with those questions, with which you are all familiar. I have endeavoured, as briefly and as clearly as my ability and the time at my disposal would permit, to trace for you the main features of the Conference of 1907. I have avoided argumentation and details. Taking now a bird's-eye view of the extensive field we have just traversed, I will close with a summary of the advantages that accrue both to Great Britain and to Canada from the Conference of 1907.

Henceforth the Imperial Conference exists. It is an institution as permanent and as regular in its organization as any Parliament within the Empire. In it each part of the Empire will be heard through their duly elected 'representatives. In future those Conferences will be meetings of Governments with Government, and the obligations of the Dominions in regard to the Empire are clearly defined. Canada's services to the Empire in the matter of Military Defence and Naval Defence have been set forth and recognized. The project of an "all red route" has been launched with every reasonable assurance of its ultimate success. In fact, the Empire, through the Imperial Conference, has advanced further than ever towards the attainment of that ideal pictured by Lord Tennyson, when he described its freedom as

"Broadening down

From precedent to precedent."

So far as our Dominion is concerned, we have had our fiscal autonomy, our legislative independence, our constitutional freedom, acknowledged and consecrated. In a word, this year of grace, 1907, has beheld Canada elevated in the eyes of the Mother Country, of her sister Dominions, and of the civilized world, and has rendered her people more and more proud of their country, their soil, and of the British institutions under which we are so happy to live.