

First Day.  
15 April 1907.

ARRANGEMENT  
OF BUSINESS.  
(Chairman.)

His Majesty's Government, or by the representatives of it, but by one of the other representatives, and Mr. Chamberlain ruled that if the Conference was not unanimous on the point they could not be admitted. Speaking for His Majesty's Government we felt that the Ministers from the Colonies under the present system really occupy the same position as my own colleagues who come into the Conference on any occasion on which any subjects in which they are interested are brought up, and they sit here and take part in the debates, as I understand it. The only difference is that they do not sit at the table and take part in the general debates unless the subject of them is one in which they are specially interested. Personally, I should be only too pleased to see all the Ministers from the Colonies who are good enough to attend these meetings in this country sitting at our table. The only thing I would like to point out as a matter of convenience is this: We are at present an assembly of eight gentlemen sitting round this table. The conversations which can take place between eight people sitting round a table can be conducted in a more familiar strain and with less formality than those of a larger meeting. I had rather wished to take up the whole of this subject in connection with the matter of the next meeting and the constitution of the Conference as a whole; but as Sir Wilfrid Laurier has mentioned it I have pointed out what I think ought not to be overlooked. As far as this Conference is concerned, if the Colonial representatives desire that other members beside the Prime Ministers should be recognised as full members of the Conference in a more distinct way than they already are — because I consider that they are already so recognised — I personally have no objection except on the pure matter of convenience. I quite recognise that there is a difference between your colleagues and mine. My colleagues have other occupations here, and your colleagues come specially for this Conference and nothing else, and they naturally would desire to see and hear all that is going on. I would suggest, as a possible solution of the matter, that if all Ministers from the Colonies are recognised as full members of the Conference, that is to say, with the full right of entry to this room, it should be understood that the Prime Ministers have the assistance, for the purpose of a debate, of the one Minister interested in the subject, and that the others, though present, should not intervene. I only suggest that as a possible solution in order to keep the numbers of the Conference within bounds. I hope the members present will clearly understand that this is a point on which I do not wish to give any ruling whatever; but I was following the principle laid down by Mr. Chamberlain. If the Conference itself desires the presence of others, I, of course, acquiesce.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: I would say that Mr. Chamberlain ruled, I think rather against his own inclination, that as a question of order, the point being taken, as other Ministers had not been invited they should not be admitted. I think he was rather favourable to their being present. I ask the question now, because at this Conference the whole subject of the constitution of the Conference is one thing to be discussed, and it would apply to the next one. I think it would be very satisfactory to Mr. Deakin if he could have a colleague of his with him, and it would be very satisfactory to me if I could have my two colleagues so that we might have the benefit of their assistance.

Mr. DEAKIN: I accept the suggestion of His Lordship.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: And I, certainly.

CHAIRMAN: My suggestion is that one member only will take part in the debate except by leave of the Conference.