

Second Day.  
17 April 1907.

PROPOSED  
IMPERIAL  
COUNCIL.  
(Mr. Deakin.)

carrying out the instructions of one Conference and for acting as an intermediary at the suggestion of any Prime Minister or any government or governments in order to prepare for the next Conference or between its meetings.

I hope I have not spoken at too great length, but the idea that we had in our mind was not an extension of power; it was an extension of inquiry, an improvement of method, a system of obtaining complete information and of enabling us to exchange views with the Government of this country or with each other. Let me say in conclusion that there are some matters of foreign politics, for instance, which occasionally touch closely, either every Dependency or some of the Dependencies of the Empire, and amongst them some or all the self-governing communities. At the present time any communication on these matters is indirect of necessity, but it is also impeded by other considerations. We may appear officious; we may appear to be assuming without sufficient knowledge that some communication of ours is called for. We desire to be in a position to be able to make such necessary inquiries in regard to foreign politics as may appear to us to be urgent and important, to make them direct, to obtain a reply, and if that reply appears to us to embody any principle, to communicate through such a Secretariat with the other self-governing communities asking that they be placed in possession of the same information in order that they may consider whether in the interests of their own people they too should not communicate direct with the Government of this country in whom the whole control of foreign affairs and defence rests. I think such occasions would be of rare occurrence, and do not think they would arise after we had once got into touch with one another more than once or twice a year, but when they did arise they might be very vital indeed to some or all of us. But in all these respects, what is intended is the continuation of the present Conference under improved conditions, systematised procedure, larger information, and whatever extra dignity or prestige would come from a higher standing, but especially in regard to the greater efficiency that we might expect from these developments. What we propose is the continuance of these Conferences with additions which in no way alter their character, principle, or dependence upon the legislative action of our respective governments.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Have you thought of the composition of the Secretariat?

Mr. DEAKIN: Yes, to this extent. My own idea is that, if possible, the Secretariat should consist either of persons new to the public life of this country, preferably trained by Colonial experience, and possibly with some official experience here, but, as far as possible, men who had been selected for their knowledge of the outer Empire, if I may so term it, of its great dominions, and of the methods of government obtaining there.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: To be appointed by whom?

Mr. DEAKIN: By the Conference practically, for the Secretariat would be its agency. It would necessarily require to be attached to some department, and when the proper time comes I shall hope to make a suggestion, without offence to the Colonial Office and certainly not to its chief, which is that there appear to us to be a great many practical reasons why it is desirable that the Colonial Office in the future should be what it was at its commencement, simply the office for the Crown Colonies. Any communications that the self-governing Colonies or self-governing Dominions have with the Mother Country should pass through another channel preferably to the Prime