

As honourable members are aware, it is only within the last few days that the agenda has been sufficiently developed to enable a statement to be made; and, indeed, I think that it is not yet finalized, and that additional subjects may be expected to be added as time goes on. The distance of New Zealand from the United Kingdom and the length of time that is necessarily taken in the transit of documents, combined with a delay on this occasion in preparing the agenda, have been the cause of some embarrassment in this connection. We are, however, leaving no stone unturned to gather the fullest possible information on every subject on the list, and we have also taken steps to obtain the views on economic subjects of the Association of New Zealand Chambers of Commerce, of the New Zealand Manufacturers' Federation, of the New Zealand Association of British Manufacturers and Agents, and of the various Control Boards. The information as it is obtained is being carefully collated and analysed in my own office, and before departure from New Zealand a complete dossier of the necessary information will be available for the New Zealand representative.

Turning now to the agenda itself, and to the first main head, "Inter-Imperial Relations," the most important subject for consideration under this head will be the report of the experts' Conference on the operation of Dominion legislation, a copy of which has already been laid before members. I do not propose to discuss this report in detail, as members may be presumed to be already familiar with it, and it is not necessary for me to call attention to the vital importance of the recommendations or to their effect on the constitutional relationships of the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Honourable members will remember that the question of the status of Dominion Governments, and their powers and obligations, has been the subject of continued discussion for a very lengthy period, and has been a matter of deep concern to several members of the Commonwealth. The individual signature by the Dominions of the Treaty of Versailles was, perhaps, the first definite step in the development of a controversy that has from time to time threatened to become acute. The deliberations of succeeding Imperial Conferences have resulted in the emergence of an entirely new theory of the constitution of the Empire, and the birth of a doctrine of Dominion status that could not be made to fit within the construction of the British Commonwealth as it has been understood in the past. The individual membership of the Dominions in the League of Nations and their constantly growing participation in international affairs inevitably focused attention upon the theory of Dominion status, and the matter received the earnest consideration of the Prime Ministers of all the Governments concerned at the Imperial Conference in 1926, when a Committee headed by the late Earl Balfour produced a momentous report, which was accepted by the plenary Conference, based on the dictum that the British Dominions are "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations." In order to bring the existing legal position into conformity with this new theory of constitutional relationships the experts' Conference, of which the report is now before the House, sat in 1929, and New Zealand was represented at this Conference by the then High Commissioner, Sir James Parr, and by Mr. S. G. Raymond, K.C.

I do not propose to enter into any examination of the necessity or the desirability of the changes in status and in powers contemplated by the 1926 Imperial Conference, and now proposed by the experts' Conference in 1929. The Governments of this Dominion, whatever their political doctrines, and the people of New Zealand would, I think, have been quite content to leave things as they were. We have not in any way been embarrassed by the terms of our association with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, nor have we been restricted in the control of our own affairs. So far as we are concerned—and I think I am interpreting the view of previous Governments as well as of the present Administration—we should have been content with the existing structure of the Empire, and we had no desire to press for any change. But it is impossible to ignore the fact that a position entirely acceptable to us has not been acceptable to other members of the British Commonwealth, and in a political organization whose most marked