

characteristic is its dependence entirely upon the good will of its component parts it is obvious that its continuance in the future must depend upon a basis acceptable to all. It was, no doubt, for this reason that the representatives of New Zealand at the 1926 Imperial Conference concurred in the report of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee and in the enunciation of the doctrine of equality of status among all His Majesty's Governments, to which I have just referred. It is from this point of view that the present Government have considered the report of the 1929 experts' Conference, and it is from this point of view that the representative of New Zealand at the forthcoming Imperial Conference must discuss that report. We are convinced that the welfare, the safety, and the prosperity of every portion of the British Commonwealth now depend to a very material extent upon its continuation as a close association of partner Governments, the policy of which should be decided after continuous consultation. New Zealand did not press for the changes that are now proposed, and in some respects, I think, New Zealand would not have wished to support the position that has now developed. We must, however, face the facts, and there can, I think, be no question that the experts' report carries to their logical conclusion the necessarily vague decisions as to Dominion status of the Imperial Conference of 1926. The Government do not feel that they could effectively oppose the acceptance of these recommendations in respect of such Dominions as may desire such a course. Whether we may approve of them or disapprove of them, we are forced to the conclusion that they flow naturally from the decisions of the 1926 Conference, and that we could not now, if we wished, alter the position that has developed. If at the forthcoming Conference, therefore, it should appear—and I have little doubt that it will appear—that the recommendations of the report meet with the common acceptance of His Majesty's other Governments, then New Zealand will not dissent.

Honourable members will have noticed that these recommendations are permissive only, and not obligatory upon any member of the British Commonwealth. Even when the immediate steps proposed by the report to facilitate the complete autonomy of the Dominions have been taken either in the form of United Kingdom legislation or otherwise, it will still remain for the New Zealand Government and for the New Zealand Parliament to decide how far these recommendations should be adopted, if at all, in respect of New Zealand. We do not propose in the meantime to take any active steps in respect of the report, and if, as will no doubt be the case, the report is adopted by the Imperial Conference, with or without amendment, then the New Zealand Parliament will be consulted before any action is taken in respect of this Dominion. Indeed, in one respect the New Zealand Government are definitely averse from carrying into effect the full implications of the report—we do not wish to make any alteration in the present powers in regard to New Zealand legislation that would adversely affect the very high standing of New Zealand credit on the London market, and whatever the event, we shall carefully safeguard the position in this respect.

The House will understand that, while the recommendations of this report, if adopted by the Imperial Conference, will no doubt dispose of any question as to the status of each member of the British Commonwealth, they cannot be regarded as a complete solution of the problems of our association together. Certain implications of the report will require to be carried to a final conclusion. It is perhaps wise, however, to take one step at a time, and I think there will be general agreement that the step that is proposed by the report is sufficiently wide for the moment. The passage of time will, no doubt, indicate further necessary adjustments in the position now to be laid down, and in the meantime, in our opinion, the most important problem of our constitutional relationships is no longer that of freedom or equality, but that of consultation and co-operation. If the British Commonwealth of Nations is to continue as we in this country devoutly hope it will, then some means must be found of co-ordinating, in so far as they have a common bearing, the now free and unrestricted activities of the several members of the Commonwealth. That from our point of view is the problem of the moment, and it is in this direction that our efforts will be principally directed at the Imperial Conference. A solution of this problem will be by no means easy to discover, and, indeed, I think that time and the tests of practice will be the principal factors in evolving a satisfactory system.