



# CONSULTATION ON MATTERS OF FOREIGN POLICY AND GENERAL IMPERIAL INTEREST.

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## Correspondence with the Governments of the self-governing Dominions.

*Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament  
by Command of His Majesty,  
December, 1924.*

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## Consultation on Matters of Foreign Policy and General Imperial Interest.

### Correspondence with the Governments of the self-governing Dominions.

No. 1.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governors-General of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, and the Governor of Newfoundland.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 23rd June, 1924.)

[*Answered by Nos. 3 and 6, 5, 4, 13 and 8 respectively.*]

23RD JUNE. Following from Prime Minister for your Prime Minister:—

*Begins:* You will probably have seen from Press reports of recent speeches of Secretary of State for the Colonies and myself in Parliament that we are concerned as to adequacy of present system of consultation with other self-governing parts of Empire on matters of foreign policy and general Imperial interest. We fully accept principle of necessity for effective arrangements for continuous consultation in all important matters of common Imperial concern, and for such necessary concerted action, founded on consultation, as the several Governments may determine (see Resolution IX of Imperial War Conference, 1917). We also realise that action to be taken as result of consultation whether at or between Imperial Conferences must be subject to constitutional requirements of each country. But we feel, as result of our experience since taking office, that system in practice has two main deficiencies.

First, it renders immediate action extremely difficult, more especially between Conferences, on occasions when such action is imperatively needed, particularly in sphere of foreign policy.

Secondly, when matters under discussion are subjects of political controversy, economic or otherwise, conclusions reached at and between Imperial Conferences are liable to be reversed through changes of Government.

Such a state of affairs inevitably leads to ineffectiveness; it also causes disappointment, and doubts are thrown on utility of whole Imperial Conference system.

What the remedy is, it is difficult to say. On the first point, *i.e.*, the importance of securing, on occasion, rapid decisions, particularly on matters of foreign policy, it occurs to us that further examination of the Resolution on Negotiation, etc., of Treaties passed at last year's Imperial Conference might be worth while in order to consider how far that Resolution needs to be supplemented and interpreted, and, whether principles

embodied in it can usefully be extended to other matters affecting foreign relations.

On the second point, *i.e.*, means of making Imperial Conference Resolutions, whether they relate to economic or other matters, more effective, what is wanted is, I think, as I indicated in a speech in Parliament on 18th June, "creation of some sort of workable machinery so that the public opinion of the whole of our Commonwealth of States should influence the policy for which the Commonwealth must be responsible."

We had in view desirability of avoiding party issues when proposing appointment of Economic Committee with a reference framed so as to exclude questions of tariff policy.

One method of bringing about result desired which was mentioned by Secretary of State in recent speech in Parliament is that Imperial Conferences in future should not be confined to representatives of parties in office for time being. When it was contemplated some years ago that a special Constitutional Conference should be held, it was proposed from more than one quarter that such a Conference should be representative of Oppositions as well as Governments. On the other hand we realise that this suggestion is open to the criticism that it would tend to hamper the frank exchange of views and unrestricted inter-communication of confidential information on such matters as foreign policy and defence which have become so outstanding features of recent Conferences.

Another method might be to continue representation of Governments only but to arrange for each Government to obtain from its own Parliament beforehand a general approval, within sufficiently wide limits, of the attitude to be taken up by its representatives. Whilst avoiding the criticism of the first method, this might tend to diminish flexibility of Conference procedure.

We should like your views on these suggestions, and if you should be able to make any others they would be welcome. We ourselves have quite an open mind, and are merely exploring situation.

Our own feeling is that time has hardly come either to revive idea of Constitutional Conference or to call special meeting of Imperial Conference to consider problems outlined above. But we should like these problems given preliminary examination in near future and it has occurred to us that possible method might be to have a meeting of, say, two representatives of each country concerned who have had experience of constitutional working, to consider these problems and present a report as basis for further discussion. How would you view this idea, and, if it commends itself, what time would be most convenient for a meeting? Possibly October might be suitable as this would permit of some of Dominion delegates to next Assembly of League of Nations being amongst representatives if this were desired.

Similar telegram sent to other Prime Ministers. RAMSAY  
MACDONALD. *Ends,*  
THOMAS,

No. 2.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of the Irish Free State.*

[Answered by No. 23.]

SIR,

Downing Street, 25th June, 1924.

I have the honour to transmit to Your Excellency, for communication to the President of the Executive Council, a copy of a telegram\* which has been sent to the other self-governing Dominions containing a message from the Prime Minister regarding the present system of consultation on matters of foreign policy and general Imperial interest.

2. The Prime Minister would be glad if the President of the Executive Council, after considering this telegram, would furnish him with his views on the suggestions put forward.

I have, &c.,

J. H. THOMAS.

No. 3.

*The Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 26th June, 1924.)

25TH JUNE. Following for Prime Minister from my Prime Minister:—

*Begins:* Your telegram of 23rd June,\* on the subject of the present system of consultation between His Majesty's Government and the other self-governing parts of the Empire on matters of foreign policy and general Imperial interest. My colleagues and myself are at present extremely occupied in winding up the present session of Parliament and unable at the moment to give to the despatch the careful consideration its importance merits. As soon as prorogation takes place we shall endeavour to give the subject matter of the despatch our best consideration.

*Ends.*

—BYNG.

*Note.*—Copies sent, by direction of the Prime Minister, to the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, the President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State, and the Prime Minister of Newfoundland by Secretary of State's despatch, 1st July.

## No. 4.

*The Governor-General of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 28th June, 1924.)

28TH JUNE. Your telegram 23rd June.\* Consultation on matters of foreign policy and general Imperial interest. Following for Prime Minister from my Prime Minister :—

*Begins:* The difficulties you point out are fully appreciated and I quite agree that a remedy is not easy to find. The point of real importance is to ensure that nothing will be done in the direction of weakening the unity of the Empire.

I fear it would not be possible for me or any other Minister to leave New Zealand for probably eighteen months but I see no objection to the appointment of a small Committee to carry out a preliminary examination of this difficult subject. If there is a general desire for such an examination it might be undertaken by men—not necessarily politicians—from different parts of the Empire who are well versed in constitutional law and procedure. Their report could be considered by the various Governments before the meeting of the next Imperial Conference. *Ends.*

—JELICOE.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 3rd July.

## No. 5.

*The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 16th July, 1924.)

[*Answered by No. 9.*]

16TH JULY. Following for Prime Minister from my Prime Minister :—

*Begins:* Your telegram of 23rd June.\* My Government has noted the statements by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and yourself in Parliament affirming the principle of full consultation with the self-governing parts of the Empire on matters

\* No. 1.

of foreign policy and general Imperial interest. We note also that you accept the principle of necessity for an effective arrangement for continuous consultations in important matters of common Imperial concern and for such concerted action as the several Governments may determine.

My Government has given a great deal of consideration to this most important question, and notes with pleasure your Government's acceptance of the basic principle.

It is, of course, obvious that in practice there are two main difficulties in establishment of an effective system of joint consultation and action, namely (a) the impossibility of full exchange of views when the Imperial Conference is not sitting, particularly in the sphere of foreign policy where immediate action is imperative, and (b) the possibility of conclusions of Imperial or Economic Conferences being reversed through change of government.

The problems which have to be considered appear to divide themselves into: (1) the manner in which an Imperial policy should be laid down in regard to matters of common Empire interest, such as foreign policy, defence, and inter-Empire trade. (2) How should consultations take place with regard to giving effect to such policy when determined upon and for its alteration where necessity arises? (3) What steps can be taken to ensure that any common policy arrived at will be given effect to irrespective of change of government in different parts of the Empire?

With regard to (1) it is now an established principle of Empire Government that Prime Minister Conferences shall take place at frequent intervals. At these Conferences a common Empire policy on questions of Imperial interest can be arrived at and submitted by the respective Prime Ministers to their individual Parliaments for their ratification and assent. The machinery for ensuring a common policy therefore already exists by holding of the Imperial Conferences, and no alteration of existing practice appears either necessary or desirable.

(2) It is unavoidable that questions of urgent foreign policy must be dealt with according to the circumstances in which they arise, and they are therefore in an entirely different category from other matters upon which a common policy may have been determined at an Imperial Conference. It appears to my Government therefore that no alteration in the underlying principle of consultation which at present exists is practicable, but considerable improvement could be effected in the operation of such machinery. These improvements should be on lines of (a) a closer liaison between the Foreign Office and Dominion Governments, which could be effected by the establishment by the Dominions of a Foreign Office Branch in their High Commissioners' Offices under the control of an officer of such standing and character as to enjoy the confidence of the Foreign Office; such a representative would be in a position to keep his

Prime Minister informed in regard to current events and atmosphere in connexion with foreign policy, in addition to information which is conveyed by cable to the Prime Minister and by information at present sent from time to time by the Foreign Office. (b) Fuller and more regular advice in regard to all questions of foreign affairs; both by cable and mail, than is at present forwarded to the Prime Ministers of the self-governing Dominions. (c) Greater efforts to anticipate questions which are likely to arise and require urgent decision, with a view to ascertaining the views of the Dominions in advance in place of informing them of decisions after they have been arrived at and acted upon or when it is too late for any alternative action to be submitted.

With regard to questions other than foreign policy, my Government is of opinion that the establishment of a permanent Imperial Secretariat responsible to the Prime Ministers of all the self-governing parts of the Empire whose task would be to prepare for the Imperial Conferences, carry out all Secretariat work during the sittings of such Conferences, follow up all Resolutions and decisions arrived at, and keep the Dominions constantly informed of developments between the Conferences, would go a long way towards solving the problem of effective and continuous consultation. This Secretariat would also embrace existing Imperial Committees such as the War Graves and Shipping, and the Economic Committee when established. It would not merely be a connecting link between the individual Dominion Governments and the British Government, but also between the Governments of the different Dominions. At the present time the Secretariat for Imperial Conferences is provided by the British Government, together with representatives of the Dominions concerned, but immediately the Conference is over the Secretariat is broken up, and no effective machinery exists for keeping the Dominions continuously informed as to developments or alterations necessitated by changed circumstances. In the opinion of my Government a great improvement would be effected by the establishment of a permanent Imperial Secretariat.

With regard to ensuring that any common policy arrived at at Imperial Conferences will be given effect to irrespective of change of Government, this appears to my Government to be quite impossible of definite solution. It appears to us, however, that the task of holding this great Empire together, which is so dependent on giving effect to a common policy arrived at at Imperial Conferences, should be raised above the ordinary level of domestic policy and not subordinated to local political issues. We are of opinion that the British Government should give greater consideration to the considered views of the Dominion Governments than in the past, otherwise all our efforts towards effective consultations and formulation of common policy will be futile.

Your suggestion that party issues might be avoided by inclusion in Imperial Conference delegations of representatives of all parliamentary parties is, in our opinion, not likely to achieve

the result desired. As you state, it would tend to hamper that frank exchange of views and unrestricted intercommunication of confidential information on such matters as foreign policy and defence. Furthermore, it might easily lead to serious consequences on the return of the delegations to their respective countries. The leader of the Government and of the Opposition would respectively feel compelled to relate his version of the Conference and his reasons for agreement or disagreement with conclusions arrived at.

Secrecy in these circumstances would be impossible. Further, an atmosphere of political controversy would inevitably obtrude into the Conference itself, and present free and unfettered discussions between men who at the time are actually shouldering responsibilities of the Government in their respective countries would disappear. My Government does not believe this suggestion would effect the result desired, but, on the contrary, believes that it would tend to increase further the difficulties which are at present experienced.

Your second suggestion that each Government shall obtain from its own Parliament beforehand a general approval within sufficiently wide limits of the attitude to be taken up by its representative is one which the Commonwealth Government has almost invariably followed. As, however, the conclusions of such Conferences must always be ratified by the respective Parliaments, my Government, does not consider this suggestion material aid in finding a solution.

We appreciate your attempt to explore the situation and agree as to the importance of finding a solution. We feel, however, that solution will be gradually evolved and consider that our object is more likely to be defeated than attained by undue precipitance.

The existing arrangements for the formation of a common Imperial policy and for subsequent consultation form the basis of a system which in the future may well become effective.

In these circumstances we do not see that any advantage is to be gained by the appointment of representatives to consider this problem and present a report as a basis for further discussion. All points at present under discussion were present to the minds of the Prime Ministers at the Imperial Conference held last year, but it was unanimously felt that the best course to pursue was to allow the situation to solve itself by gradual evolution rather than by immediate definite action.

My Government therefore does not propose to send representatives to a conference to discuss these questions, but is prepared during the interval until the next Imperial Conference is held to explore further any suggestions that may be put forward, and also to offer for similar consideration by other governments concerned any improvements in the existing machinery which may occur to us. *Ends.*

—FORSTER.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 24th July.

No. 6.

*The Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 8th August, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 11.]

7TH AUGUST. Following from Prime Minister for your Prime Minister:—

*Begins:* Re preliminary meeting inter-Imperial consultation, our Government has now considered proposals set out in your telegram of 23rd June.\* We agree as to the desirability of more definite understanding on matters therein referred to. Questions are not new and very marked progress has been made in their clarification and solution particularly in recent years. Whilst finality is not possible in constantly changing situation, doubtless further steps can be taken. Difficulty is inherent in existence of several self-governing communities scattered over the globe with, in large part, different neighbours and different problems, and is increased by absence of precedent for the experiment in co-operation which members of British community of nations are working out. We believe with goodwill which has always prevailed, it can continue to be met.

As to first of specific proposals, we agree that it would be helpful to consider possibilities of further extension of principle embodied in Resolution on negotiation, etc., of treaties. Second proposal does not appear feasible. It is undoubtedly inconvenient to have reversal of policy but this liberty must be assured so long as separate Parliaments exist and electors are to be free to have policy determined in accordance with their wishes. As a matter of fact even with change in Government there is very considerable measure of continuity of essential policy. Proposal to have all parties represented in the Imperial Conferences with a view to preventing policy agreed upon thereat being rejected by existing or future Parliaments would seem to imply setting up a new body supreme over the several Parliaments. We regard the Imperial Conference as Conference of Governments of which each is responsible to its own Parliament and ultimately to its own electorate and in no sense as Imperial Council determining the policy of the Empire as a whole. We would deem it most inadvisable to depart in any particular from this conception which is based on well established principles of Ministerial responsibility and the supremacy of Parliament. We consider that with respect to all Imperial Conference resolutions or proposals each Government must accept responsibility for its attitude and the Opposition or Oppositions be free to criticise; with Parliaments and if occasion arises peoples deciding the issues.

As to approval by Parliament in advance of the attitude to be taken by our representative we feel that this could be given

\* No. 1.

only where Parliament had knowledge in advance of specific questions to be considered and in the light of the then existing circumstances. We agree that even in such cases adoption of this method might tend to diminish the flexibility of Conference procedure.

We share the feeling expressed in your message that the time has hardly come either to revive the idea of constitutional Conference or to call a special meeting of the Imperial Conference to consider these problems. We would be prepared, however, to take part in the manner suggested in meeting in the near future for preliminary examination of these problems and preparation of Report as basis for further discussions provided that other parts of the Empire agree and date convenient for all can be found. Early in October would appear to us to be the most convenient time for such meeting. *Ends.*

BYNG.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th August.

No. 7.

*The Governor-General of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 11th August, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 10.]

11TH AUGUST. Your telegram 23rd June,\* my telegram 28th June.† Consultation on matters of foreign policy and general Imperial interest. My Prime Minister would be glad to learn whether, as a result of your communication with the Dominions, there is a general desire for the appointment of proposed Committee to undertake preliminary examination, and, if so, what has been decided. Mr. Massey has been questioned in Parliament on the subject.—JELlicoe.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th August.

No. 8.

*The Governor of Newfoundland to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 17th August, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 24.]

16TH AUGUST. Your telegram of 23rd June.\* Imperial Conferences. My Prime Minister desires me to state, for the information of the Prime Minister, that the proposal that the Opposition as

\* No. 1.

† No. 4.

well as the Government should be represented at the Conference or that the Government should obtain general approval by Parliament in advance does not favourably impress him or seem practicable, that the whole subject is too large and intricate seemingly for discussion by correspondence, and that the preliminary examination such as Prime Minister suggests would seem essential to progress. If the Prime Minister will advise date most suitable to the others, my Prime Minister will arrange for representatives as suggested.—ALLARDYCE.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and the Irish Free State by despatch, 27th August.

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No. 9.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 18th August, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 14.]

Following from Prime Minister for your Prime Minister :—

*Begins:* I have been waiting to reply to your message 16th July\* containing views of Commonwealth Government on suggestions referred to in my message 23rd June† as to consultation with Dominions on foreign policy, etc., until I had received replies from other Dominions. Reply of Prime Minister of New Zealand forwarded in Secretary of State's despatch 3rd July.‡ Reply of Prime Minister of Canada recently received and is being sent by mail. Gist is as follows :—

*Begins:* Canadian Government agree that it would be helpful to consider possibilities of further extension of principle embodied in 1923 Resolution on negotiation, etc., of treaties. Proposal to have all political parties represented at Imperial Conference does not appear feasible. Canadian Government regard Conference as Conference of Governments of which each is responsible to its own Parliament and ultimately to its own electorate, and in no sense as Imperial Council determining policy for Empire as a whole, and would deem it most inadvisable to depart in any particular from this conception, which is based on well-established principles of Ministerial responsibility and supremacy of Parliament. Canadian Government share feeling that time has hardly come either to revive idea of Constitutional Conference or to call special meeting of Imperial Conference to consider problems, but would be prepared to take part in meeting in near future for preliminary examination of problems and preparation of report as basis for further dis-

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\* No. 5. † No. 1. ‡ Not printed; it forwarded, for communication to the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth, a copy of No. 4.

cussions provided that other parts of Empire agree and date convenient for all can be found. Early in October would appear most convenient time. *Ends.*

Replies of other Dominion Prime Ministers not yet received, but I am reminding them and will let you know result. In the circumstances I hope that Government of Commonwealth of Australia may be prepared to reconsider question and to participate in preliminary meeting. It looks, however, as though it would not be practicable to hold this meeting before November. In view of recent events we should like to include among matters to be discussed method of representation of British Empire at future International Conferences. *Ends.*

—SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th August.

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No 10.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of New Zealand.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 18th August, 1924.)

Your telegram 11th August.\* Consultation with Dominions on foreign policy, etc. Apart from New Zealand, only replies so far received are from Canada and Commonwealth of Australia. Prime Minister is reminding other Prime Ministers. Copy of reply of Prime Minister of Canada being sent by mail.

As regards suggested preliminary inquiry, it states that Canadian Government share feeling that time has hardly come either to revive idea of Constitutional Conference or to call special meeting of Imperial Conference to consider problems, but would be prepared to take part in meeting in near future for preliminary examination of problems and preparation of report as basis for further discussions provided that other parts of Empire agree and date convenient for all can be found. Early in October would appear to them most convenient time.

Reply of Prime Minister of Commonwealth of Australia enclosed in my despatch 24th July.† It states that Commonwealth Government appreciate attempt to explore situation and agree as to importance of finding solution, but feel that solution will be gradually evolved and consider that object more likely to be defeated than attained by undue precipitance. Existing arrangements for formation of common Imperial policy and for subsequent consultation form basis of system which in future may well become effective. In these circumstances Commonwealth Government do not see that any advantage is to be gained by appointment of representatives to consider problem and present report as basis for future discussion

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\* No. 7.

† Not printed; it enclosed, for communication to the Prime Minister of New Zealand, a copy of No. 5.

and do not propose to send representatives to such Conference, but are prepared during interval until next Imperial Conference is held to explore further any suggestions that may be put forward, and also to offer for similar consideration by other Governments concerned any improvements in existing machinery which may occur to them.

Prime Minister is now sending message to Prime Minister of Commonwealth of Australia summarising position as regards replies of other Dominions and expressing hope that Commonwealth Government may be prepared to reconsider question and to participate in proposed preliminary meeting. Telegram adds that it looks now as though it would not be practicable to hold this meeting before November, and also that, in view of recent events, we should like to include among matters to be discussed method of representation of British Empire at future International Conferences.—  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th August.

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No. 11.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of Canada.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 18th August, 1924.)

18TH AUGUST. Following from Prime Minister for your Prime Minister :—

*Begins:* Your message of 7th August.\* You will have received by now copies of replies from Australia and New Zealand† to my message of 23rd June.‡ I am replying to former that I hope Commonwealth Government may be prepared to reconsider question and to participate in proposed preliminary meeting. I am taking steps to remind other Prime Ministers and will let you know result. It looks, however, as though it would not be practicable to hold the meeting before November. In view of recent events, we should like to include among matters to be discussed method of representation of British Empire at future international Conferences. *Ends.*

—SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th August.

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\* No. 6.

† Nos. 5 and 4.

‡ No. 1.

No. 12.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of the Union of South Africa.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 18th August, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 13.]

18TH AUGUST. My telegram 23rd June.\* Consultation with Dominions on matters of foreign policy, etc. Please inform your Prime Minister that Prime Minister would be grateful for early expression of his views.

Replies of Prime Minister of Commonwealth of Australia and Prime Minister of New Zealand enclosed in my despatch 24th July, my despatch 3rd July.† Prime Minister is replying to Prime Minister of Commonwealth that he hopes Commonwealth Government may be prepared to reconsider question and to participate in proposed meeting. Reply of Prime Minister of Canada recently received‡ and is being sent by mail. Canadian Government share feeling that time has hardly come either to revive idea of Constitutional Conference or to call special meeting of Imperial Conference to consider problems, but would be prepared to take part in meeting in near future for preliminary examination of problems and preparation of report as basis for further discussions, provided that other parts of Empire agree, and date convenient for all can be found. Early in October would appear to them most convenient time.

As regards latter point, I should mention that it looks now as though it would not be practicable to hold proposed preliminary meeting before November. In view of recent events, we should like to include among matters to be discussed method of representation of British Empire at future International Conferences.—  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th August.

No. 13.

*The Governor-General of the Union of South Africa to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 21st August, 1924.)

21ST AUGUST. Your telegrams, 23rd June and 18th August.§ Consultations with Dominions on matters of foreign policy, etc. Following for Prime Minister from my Prime Minister:—

*Begin:* The Government, after careful consideration of the question of a Conference on the problem of consultations with

\* No. 1. † Not printed; they enclosed copies of Nos. 5 and 4 respectively.

‡ No. 6. § Nos. 1 and 12.

the Dominions on matters of foreign policy, etc., regret that it cannot see its way clear to take part in such Conference during the course of this year. It at the same time feels that a special Conference for the purpose of preliminary consideration and advice on the problem is, under the circumstances, very unlikely to prove of any advantage for coming to a final decision. The Government therefore does not think it advisable to send representatives to such a Conference. *Ends.*

—ATHLONE.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 27th August.

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No. 14.

*The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 22nd August, 1924.)

22ND AUGUST. Following for Prime Minister from my Prime Minister:—

*Begins:* Your telegram of 18th August,\* with further reference to the suggested Conference for preliminary examination of and preparation of report on the question of representation of the British Empire at future International Conferences, consultations on foreign policy, etc., to hand.

I note that the Canadian Government is of opinion that the time has hardly come to revive the idea of Constitutional Conference or to call special meeting of Imperial Conference to consider these problems, and that, further, if a Conference is held it is to be regarded in no sense as an Imperial Council determining the policy for the Empire as a whole.

I note, too, that Canada is of opinion that representation of all political parties is open to objection.

Your telegram of 23rd June† indicates that your Government's suggestion is for a junior Conference to explore generally the problem of representation, etc., and that report of such Conference will entail no responsibility whatever on the Governments concerned, but will constitute merely an expression of opinion for the guidance of such Governments.

If this is the case and all other Dominions are agreeable, while still adhering to the views expressed in my telegram of 16th July,‡ my Government is prepared to co-operate on the principle that anything which even remotely tends to improve the relations between the various Governments of the Empire is worthy of trial.

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\* No. 9.

† No. 1.

‡ No. 5.

October, however, is not a suitable date for Australia. We would prefer some time in late November. On receipt of replies from the Dominions and advice of your suggestion to proceed with the Conference, we will inform you by whom Australia will be represented. *Ends.*

—FORSTER.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 27th August.

No. 15.

*The Governor-General of the Union of South Africa to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 5th September, 1924.)

5TH SEPTEMBER. My telegram of 21st August.\* Ministers inform me that, after discussing with Mr. Thomas† the question of holding of a preliminary Conference on the subject of proposed constitutional inquiry, they now agree to the Union participating.

They regret that it will not be possible for them to be represented by a Minister at this Conference owing to the meeting of the Union Parliament at the beginning of the coming year.

They consider that February next would be preferable date, but have no objection to the conference being held late in November, and a delegate will be sent from the Union to attend the Conference.

—ATHLONE.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 10th September.

No. 16.

*The Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 6th September, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 19.]

5TH SEPTEMBER. Proposed preliminary Constitutional Conference. My Ministers would like to be advised whether, in view of

\* No. 13.

† Mr. Thomas was at the time in South Africa as Chairman of the Delegation of the Empire Parliamentary Association.

replies received from the self-governing Dominions to your communication of 23rd June,\* His Majesty's Government has definitely decided to hold the proposed preliminary Conference this fall and, if so, at what date. If the Conference is to be held, some little time will be necessary to arrange necessary representation, and my Ministers would, therefore, like to be advised just as soon as may be possible of what may be decided. Canadian Government would also like to be informed, in so far as it may be possible to give indication, of proposed personnel of the Conference, *i.e.*, whether delegations will be composed of Ministers of the Crown, permanent officials or delegates specially chosen regardless of their association with Administration.—BYNG.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 10th September.

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No. 17.

*The Governor-General of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 10th September, 1924.)

[*Answered by No. 18.*]

10TH SEPTEMBER. Your telegram of 18th August.† Consultations on matters of Foreign Policy, etc.

Prime Minister would be glad to learn whether it has been definitely decided to hold the proposed preliminary meeting and, if so, on what date.—JELlicoe.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 16th September.

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No. 18.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of New Zealand.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 15th September, 1924.)

Your telegram 10th September.‡ Please inform your Prime Minister that Governments of Canada, Union of South Africa and

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\* No. 1.

† No. 10.

‡ No. 17.

Newfoundland, in addition to Government of New Zealand, have now intimated willingness to participate in proposed inquiry, and Government of Commonwealth of Australia prepared to participate if all other Dominions agreeable. Reply still awaited from Government of Irish Free State, who are being reminded. His Majesty's Government are now working out definite proposals as to agenda, representatives, time, etc., and further telegram will be sent as soon as possible.—SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 16th September.

## No. 19.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of Canada.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 15th September, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 20.]

15TH SEPTEMBER. Your telegram of 5th September.\* Governments of New Zealand, Union of South Africa and Newfoundland, in addition to Canadian Government, have now intimated willingness to participate in proposed inquiry, and Government of Commonwealth of Australia prepared to participate if all other Dominions agreeable. Reply still awaited from Government of Irish Free State, who are being reminded. His Majesty's Government are now working out definite proposals as to agenda, representatives, time, etc., and further telegram will be sent as soon as possible.—SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 16th September.

## No. 20.

*The Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 19th September, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 21.]

18TH SEPTEMBER. Your telegram of 15th September.† My Ministers represent that it is the desire of the Canadian Government

\* No. 16.

† No. 19.

that when His Majesty's Government have worked out a definite proposal as to the agenda, representatives, time, etc., Canadian delegation at Geneva may be informed simultaneously with this Government. I am also to represent that the Canadian Government trust that it may be possible to convene the proposed Constitutional Conference not later than the middle of October.—BYNG.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 30th September.

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No. 21.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General of Canada.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 19th September, 1924.)

[Answered by No. 22.]

19TH SEPTEMBER. Your telegram 18th September,\* proposed constitutional inquiry. Your Prime Minister will have observed from message from Prime Minister of Commonwealth of Australia, 22nd August,† that Commonwealth Government did not regard October as suitable date and would prefer some time in late November. Government of Union of South Africa have stated that February next would be preferable date though they have no objection to late November. In the circumstances, feared that there is no prospect of its being practicable to hold inquiry as early as middle of October.—SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 30th September.

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No. 22.

*The Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Received 26th September, 1924.)

26TH SEPTEMBER. Your telegram of 19th September.‡ Proposed Constitutional Inquiry. In view of your statement that there is no prospect of its being practicable to hold the inquiry as early as

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\* No. 20.

† No. 14.

‡ No. 21.

the middle of October, our Government favours indefinite postponement and that the matters which were to have been dealt with in the Conference be taken up by correspondence. In your telegram of 23rd June\* you suggested holding preliminary meeting of, say, two representatives of each country possibly in October to permit of some of the Dominion delegates to League of Nations being amongst the representatives. With this in view we arranged for our Ministerial delegates at Geneva to take part in the Conference at London in October after the conclusion of the League of Nations Assembly. These Delegates have made unalterable engagements in Canada later in the year which will not permit of their remaining in London on into November.—BYNG.

*Note.*—Copies sent to the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Newfoundland by despatch, 30th September.

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No. 23.

*The Governor-General of the Irish Free State to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

(Received 11th October, 1924.)

Vice-Regal Lodge, Dublin, 10th October, 1924.

SIR,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your despatch of the 20th August† and previous correspondence on the subject of the present system of consultation on matters of foreign policy and general Commonwealth interest, and to express regret that a reply should have been so long delayed.

2. My Ministers have now carefully considered the suggestions set forth in the telegram transmitted with your despatch of the 25th June.‡ They would be prepared to take part in the manner suggested in a Conference for the preliminary examination of these problems and the preparation of a report as a basis for further discussion.

3. My Ministers are convinced that, while the proposed Conference cannot strictly be termed a Constitutional Conference, the suggested programme involves matters of grave constitutional importance which require long and serious consideration beforehand.

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\* No. 1. † Not printed; it enclosed copies of Nos. 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12. ‡ No. 2.

4. They will, therefore, be glad to learn as soon as possible whether a date can now be fixed for the Conference.

I have, etc.,

T. M. HEALY.

*Note.*—Copies sent to Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and Newfoundland by despatch, 20th October.

No. 24.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governors-General of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, and the Governor of Newfoundland.*

[TELEGRAM.]

(Sent 13th October, 1924.)

13TH OCTOBER. Proposed Constitutional Inquiry. Please inform your Prime Minister that I was asked in House of Commons before the dissolution what was date contemplated for constitutional inquiry referred to in Prime Minister's message of 23rd June.\* I replied that I could only say that nothing which has happened in Parliament here should in our opinion interfere with the Government going on with their proposal. But your Prime Minister will appreciate that we find it impossible in present circumstances to suggest date for meeting.

Similar message sent to other Dominions.—THOMAS.

*Note.*—Copy sent to the Irish Free State by despatch, 14th October.

No. 25.

*The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governors-General of Canada, the Commonwealth of Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and the Irish Free State, and the Governor of Newfoundland.*

Downing Street, 2nd December, 1924.

MY LORD,

SIR,

I have the honour to request [Your Excellency] [you] to inform your Ministers that His Majesty's Government have had under consideration the suggestion of their predecessors that an inquiry might be held in connection with the present system of consultation on matters of foreign policy and general Imperial interest—*vide* Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's message of the 23rd June.\*

\* No. 1.

2. The resulting correspondence, which has already been communicated to your Ministers, disclosed considerable doubt as to the advisability of taking action in the sense suggested in Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's message. It was generally agreed that the time had not come to revive the idea of a special Constitutional Conference, though ultimately and after some hesitation participation in a preliminary inquiry was accepted in principle by all the Dominions, provided that a convenient time could be found. It had not, however, been found possible at the time of the dissolution of Parliament to make any arrangements for the holding of such a preliminary inquiry, chiefly owing to the difficulty of fixing a date which would be suitable for all the Governments concerned.

3. His Majesty's present advisers are very sensible of the importance of the issues involved; they find themselves fully in agreement with the principles of consultation and concerted action set out in the opening sentences of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's message and they are determined to carry out those principles to the utmost. But, whilst difficulties undoubtedly exist in making the present system of consultation fully effective, His Majesty's Government have grave doubts whether some of the suggestions set out in the latter part of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's message would improve the present system; they also question whether at the present stage an inquiry of the nature suggested would lead to any practical result.

4. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's message made special reference to the Resolution on the negotiation, signature and ratification of Treaties passed at the Imperial Conference of 1923, and suggested that further examination of the Resolution might be worth while, in order to consider how far the Resolution needed to be supplemented and interpreted, and whether the principles embodied in it could usefully be extended to other matters affecting foreign relations. On this point, in particular, His Majesty's Government feel that the time which has elapsed since the Resolution was passed is hardly sufficient to enable any very definite opinion to be given. For themselves, they would prefer to defer a considered judgment until they have had an opportunity of studying for a longer period the working of the Resolution in practice.

5. For these reasons His Majesty's Government doubt whether there would be any advantage in pursuing further, at this stage, the proposal for a special inquiry into the matters referred to in Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's message. On the other hand I need hardly add that, in carrying out the policy of working in concert with the Dominion Governments in all matters affecting foreign relations and the common interests of the British Empire, they desire to avail themselves of every opportunity that may present itself for personal consultation between Ministers or with such other representatives as the Dominion Governments may at any time wish to entrust with the task of representing their own views or of ascertaining those of the British Government.

6. There is one pressing matter raising issues which affect the vital interests of the whole Empire, on which personal consultation is, in the view of His Majesty's Government, essential. I refer to the Protocol for the pacific settlement of International disputes. With regard to the arrangements to be made for securing personal consultation His Majesty's Government hope to communicate with your Ministers at a very early date.

I have, etc.,

L. S. AMERY.

