

The question naturally arises, Why should so much importance be attached to matters of procedure and matters of voting when the Conference had only the power of recommendation, not of decision, and when each member of the Council of Foreign Ministers would have the power in the final drafting stage to veto any proposal of which it disapproved? The answer is that the power of recommendation was by no means unimportant. A recommendation favourable to the proposal of one of the Four Powers would strengthen that Power's position when presenting that proposal to the Council of Foreign Ministers, all the more so because the world publicity centred on recommendations of the Conference would react unfavourably upon any one of the Big Powers which might be so "undemocratic" as to use its veto to prevent the will of a majority of the belligerent nations from finding expression in the peace treaties. In these circumstances it is understandable that the Four Powers, who, after ten months of strained negotiation, had reached a series of compromises on draft peace treaties which delicately balanced their conflicting interests, were not anxious to adopt any procedure which would make it possible for any one of the Four to upset that compromise and secure more favourable terms at the final drafting session of the Council of Foreign Ministers.

The composition of the Conference of twenty-one, moreover, was such that any changing of the compromise would be disadvantageous to the U.S.S.R. It became abundantly clear in the course of the Conference, which was held at a time when international relations were tense, that a "Slav" or "Eastern" Bloc existed. Probably because of the identity of their views and interests, this group of six States (U.S.S.R., Ukraine, Byelo-Russia, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Czechoslovakia) almost invariably voted together. But the Eastern Bloc of six was outnumbered by a larger group of thirteen (the so-called "Western Bloc"—U.S.A., United Kingdom, China, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Netherlands, Greece, Brazil, and usually France and Ethiopia), not rigidly bound, but sharing similar standards and interests and on the most important issues voting the same way. Belgium and Norway adhered consistently to neither "bloc," but cast more votes on the "Western" side. Field Marshal Smuts put the matter squarely before the Plenary Conference on 7 October :—

"In debate and outlook a cleavage has been revealed which, if not cleared up and removed, may bode ill for the future of this Conference, and of world peace. Those who examine the debates and votes will be struck by the constancy with which those whom I may call the Slav Group on the one hand, and the Western Group on the other, have voted against each other. It has been the revelation of this Conference. In importance it may yet come to overshadow the Conference itself. I therefore think it right to stress this so that it should not be overlooked or hushed up, but openly discussed and ventilated before this Conference."