

2nd Day.]

IMPERIAL COUNCIL.

[25 May, 1911.]

Mr. PEARCE : I think it necessary, in fairness to us, that we should know if that is put forward by you as a condition of the Council.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : By the time I have finished I will have endeavoured to make myself as clear as I possibly can, and, of course, I quite recognise that what I am saying calls for a reply from other representatives here. I also recognise that, perhaps, the views I entertain may not be in accord with those of any other member of the Conference. But you will also realise that, even though he should stand alone, the fact should not deter one from expressing his sincere opinions upon matters which he considers to be of sufficient importance for every member of the Conference to discuss.

I must say, Mr. Asquith, that I am not attacking—I want to make that quite clear—either the Dominion of Canada or the Commonwealth of Australia. Quite the contrary. I recognise that the responsibility for the policy of those countries rests entirely with the Governments of the respective countries. I am trying, what I admit to be a difficult task, to point out how I believe the whole strength of the naval protection across the seas, irrespective of the sea-coast of all our countries, could be made very much stronger, and how the protection of all parts of the Empire could be made better by abandoning the present divided system. And my belief is that the only way in which that change could be brought about is by the creation of some authorized Council of Defence or Council of State, with the representatives of Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and Newfoundland upon it, and giving them the necessary powers to deal with the question of naval defence, and of naval defence only, and the right to be consulted before they are committed to a war policy which may be necessary in the best interests of the Empire as a whole. The overseas Dominions are bound to be in a minority of such a Council, I recognise; but it is because to-day the people are not consulted, and cannot be consulted under the existing system, that I am putting forward this proposition. I recollect Sir Wilfrid Laurier himself on one occasion stating that Canada would have no voice in a matter of the kind, and that for that reason he took exception to proposals to have but one British Navy. I think that is a strong position to take up, and it is one I take up myself.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : The point of my observation was that you are advocating the creation of an Imperial Council.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : Yes.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : You are advocating at the same time contributions. I do not see the relevancy of your argument towards the object which you have in view in addressing the Conference as to the Imperial Council. Contributions can be given to-day if any of the Dominions choose to do so. You have done it; other parties have refused to do so. Therefore I do not see the relevancy of it, except it also involves that this Imperial Council which you propose would have the power to fix the contribution, to which, for my part, I would very seriously object.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : In reply to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Mr. Asquith, the point I want to make clear is this : it is quite true that any one of the oversea Dominions to-day may give a contribution, but they may withhold it; and it is quite true that in the event of any portion of the British Empire being drawn into a war, that one portion of the Empire might say, "I am not going to take part in it," and they need not give a contribution, although under international law I think they could not avoid having the responsibility of being a belligerent put upon them. What I want to bring about is a uniformity of system for the preservation of the whole of our oversea interests.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : That is to say, the Imperial Council could compel us.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : We should fix a basis upon which a contribution should be levied for sea defence in the general interests of the whole.