

25 May, 1911.]

IMPERIAL COUNCIL.

[2nd Day.

The PRESIDENT : Your suggestion is that the Imperial Council, unless it is to be a mere academic thing, is to have the power of imposing that obligation ?

Sir JOSEPH WARD : Quite so.

The PRESIDENT : Even on a dissentient Dominion ?

Sir JOSEPH WARD : Mr. Asquith, at the present moment if England went to war all the oversea Dominions are directly affected by the results, and that could happen without the slightest reference to either an assenting or a dissenting Dominion.

The PRESIDENT : We cannot get a contribution to the Navy without the assent of the Dominion.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : But you can involve them in war.

The PRESIDENT : That is another matter. I am speaking now of the naval contribution. Canada has never given us a naval contribution.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : I know that is so.

The PRESIDENT : And we have never attempted to exact one from her. Of course, we know our business better than that. I only want to understand, and I think the members of the Conference want to understand, what the length and breath of the proposal is. Is it that, so far as regards what you call the uniform naval system, it should be in the power of this new body to impose *in invitum*, against a particular Dominion, a policy of contribution to which that Dominion would not voluntarily assent ?

General BOTHA : And fix the amount ?

The PRESIDENT : And fix the amount.

Mr. FISHER : By a benevolent revolution, I suppose ?

Sir JOSEPH WARD : As a matter of fact, if the proposal is to establish an ineffective nominal Council which is going to hold out to the eye the prospect of doing something of interest to the Empire as a whole, if we are not to establish something that has got some power to do good to the Empire as a whole, it is far better to drop the whole thing. That is my opinion; we have to consider whether the time has not arrived, in the general interests of Great Britain and the whole of our oversea Possessions, when we should not have some uniformity of system of contribution, or whether it is to be left to the voluntary decision of those oversea countries whose requirements for protection by the British Navy are becoming greater every year. If we are not to have some effective system, then, as far as my judgment goes, all the efforts to bring about co-ordination and co-operation are to a very large extent in vain and a drifting apart must inevitably ensue.

I want to say again, and to emphasize it, that I am not foolish enough not to recognise that the proposals I am making are surrounded with very great difficulties. I realise that from the start; but that does not deter one from making them, if he believes something in the direction he is advocating is desirable and that it may, in the future at all events, be brought into operation. For that reason my opinion is that there ought to be established an Imperial Council or an Imperial Parliament of Defence, in the interests—

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : There is a difference between a Council and a Parliament. What do you propose, a Parliament or a Council ? I want a proper definition of what you mean, because you have proposed neither so far.