

2nd Day.]

IMPERIAL COUNCIL.

[25 May, 1911.]

The PRESIDENT: What is to be the position of the Imperial Government? Where does it come in? Are they to conduct negotiations with Foreign Powers up to the point when there is a possibility of a rupture, and then is your executive to come in to determine whether or not we are to go to war?

Sir JOSEPH WARD: They would have 220 members from Great Britain.

The PRESIDENT: I am speaking of the executive. The British Cabinet, at present, is responsible for the conduct of our relations with foreign countries. We carry on, of course, with all the secrecy that diplomacy requires, these negotiations in the interests of the Empire as a whole. We get to a point, or we might conceivably get to a point, in which it was a question whether or not there should be a rupture between us and a great Foreign Power. At present the Cabinet decides that on its own responsibility. Parliament dismisses them if they are not satisfied that they have acted rightly. What I want to know from you is—so as to understand the proposition—whether it amounts to this: that at that point, the negotiations having been conducted up to that point by the British Cabinet, it is then to hand over the determination of the question of peace or war to your new executive, responsible to the Parliament of Defence? I do not ask in any hostile spirit; I only want to know if that is the proposal.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: My answer to that, Mr. Asquith, is that the executive suggested in this would be an executive representing in the same proportions the British people as are now represented by the British public in the Imperial Parliament. There would, of course, be a preponderance of British representatives upon that body which would carry on everything you are suggesting with the same secrecy.

The PRESIDENT: How then would you be better off than now?

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Because now we have no voice or say.

The PRESIDENT: Your voice, as you say, would always be overruled; you say it is an essential factor of the arrangement that the British should always be in a vast preponderance.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: That does not get over the fact that none of the British Dominions are represented directly or indirectly at the present time.

The PRESIDENT: I wanted to see what the effect would be.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I think the people of the oversea Dominions are entitled to representation in connection with such far-reaching matters. I recognise that representation does not mean control—very far from it; if it meant control I should say that your view of the matter was absolutely unanswerable. The control still remains with the British people.

The PRESIDENT: I am not putting any view in opposition; I only asked you the question.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I know. In matters of naval defence I believe sincerely the whole position could be made impregnable as far as the oversea Dominions are concerned, providing for them all the advantages they get by having anything in the shape of local navies. The whole of the building operations could be carried out without any difficulty, naval construction yards could be provided in the several Dominions by a *per capita* contribution such as I have named. By this means the distant countries might certainly hope to have, not an imaginative local navy that in all human probability would not be able to do what they required in times of stress, but they would have one that could beyond all question do what was necessary, and which, added to the present British Navy, would make it so powerful as to make the peace of the world absolutely assured. In other words, there would be all the advantages that now accrue, only greater in my opinion, to the local places. The building programme in the