

2nd Day.]

IMPERIAL COUNCIL.

[25 May, 1911.]

The PRESIDENT—*cont.*

we all have for the skill and ability with which Sir Joseph Ward has presented his case, and a great deal of sympathy with many of the objects he has in view, I think we must agree that on its merits this proposal is not a practical one, and that, even if it were so, even if it could be shown to be so, the fact that it not only does not receive the unanimous consent of all the representatives of the Dominions, but is repudiated by them all except Sir Joseph Ward himself, is for the purposes of this Conference a fatal and, indeed, an insuperable objection to its adoption.

I do not know whether you would like to say anything further, Sir Joseph.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Yes, I desire to deal with some points, Mr. Asquith. I want to direct attention to the fact that there is apparently misapprehension in your own mind, and I also assume in the minds of others, as to this power which is said to have been suggested by me to impose unlimited taxation and responsibilities on the oversea Dominions. I not only did not do that, but I want to remind the Conference of the fact that I suggested that it should be half of what might be imposed on the Mother Country. That is a material difference to the impression which seems to have been conveyed, that I was suggesting that a door should be opened by which unlimited responsibility should be placed on the oversea Dominions. I did not do that, and I want to make that quite clear.

Now, I also recognise the undeniable right of the other representatives at the Conference to entertain the views to which they have given utterance and to which naturally I take no exception, as I have a profound respect for the individual representatives of the various oversea Dominions, and for the Prime Minister of the British Government, but I do not want to have go on record an inference that I have been suggesting the proposal which Sir Wilfrid Laurier imagined I had made—that I provided for no power to create revenue. I am under the impression that Sir Wilfrid Laurier could not have heard what I stated, otherwise he would not have ascribed to me a statement of that kind, because I not only did not make it, but I did suggest what would require to be done in the first 10 years in the matter of revenue; I did suggest that the power should be left to the individual Dominions as to what they should do after the end of the 10 years, and I did point out in connection with the proposed establishment of an Imperial Parliament of Defence that, among other things, we should alleviate the direct burden upon the Dominions that have elected to establish a local navy. I did point out we could reduce the amount they were individually contributing by having the system of a charge *per capita* over the white population of the respective oversea Dominions, and I do not quite appreciate the idea from my point of view of its being supposed that in dealing with a proposal of this kind I forgot the very important question of revenue. If I had forgotten it I should very reluctantly against myself be compelled to say that Sir Wilfrid Laurier was quite correct in stating that where revenue was left out in connection with a proposal for expenditure any such scheme would be impracticable; but as I did not leave that question out, as I made it as far as I could quite clear that there must be an obligation on the part of those concerned to provide revenue, and as I suggested the way (which, of course, might be improved upon) in which it should be done, I want at once, at all events, to correct the impression which might be assumed from Sir Wilfrid Laurier's statement that I had forgotten that important aspect of the matter. I think it is only fair to myself that I should make that statement, because I did not forget it.

Now, may I also say to my friend Mr. Fisher, the representative of Australia, that in the course of his remarks he gave utterance to an expression that I most heartily and warmly support—that the Commonwealth Government relied upon the British Government for the protection of all parts of the British Empire so far as the Navy was concerned, the Australian Commonwealth doing its part locally. I have the feeling, as the representative of one of the oversea Dominions, that where the British people or the British Government make provision for the protection of all British interests in all parts of the world, including oversea routes from Australia and elsewhere, as a matter of common practical defence, instead of having a divided system where the British authorities protect those interests all over the world as Mr. Fisher has said, and