

The fullest opportunity was afforded to the Dominion delegates for the exercise of this right of audience and consultation, not merely by their presence at the plenary and public sessions of the Conference itself, and by their presence as members of the several committees in which the detailed negotiations proceeded, but also by the practice of holding repeated meetings of all the members of the British Delegation itself. At these meetings, of which there were no less than twenty-five during the period of the Conference, the Delegation associated with itself the chief technical advisers of the British Government. Full and free discussion took place as to all questions which had come or were likely to come before the Conference, and decisions were arrived at as to the policy to be adopted on behalf of the Empire at meetings of the Conference and of its committees.

These internal negotiations and discussions of the British Delegation proceeded throughout with the utmost harmony, and with the most ungrudging and courteous recognition on the part of the delegates from Great Britain of the right of the Dominion representatives to participate in the international policy of the Empire. No question ever arose on which it was found impossible to secure ultimate unanimity of decision within the British Delegation. If unfortunately it had been otherwise, and if any Dominion delegate, either of his own motion or under the instructions of his Government, had found himself unable to agree to some proposal which commended itself to the Delegation, it would then have been necessary for His Majesty's general plenipotentiaries from Great Britain to determine in their own discretion the action to be taken. If they were of opinion that the matter in dispute was of such minor importance, or related so exclusively to the Dominion itself, that the views of that Dominion ought to be acceded to for the sake of unanimity, this result could have been attained either by a modification of the terms of the proposed treaty or by excluding the dissentient Dominion from its operation unless and until it chose through its Government or Parliament to give its subsequent adherence. If, on the other hand, it was considered that the matter was of such general importance that dissent on the part of a Dominion should be disregarded in the interests of the whole Empire, it would have been within the authority of the plenipotentiaries of Great Britain to assent to the treaty on behalf of the Empire as a whole, without regard to such dissent. The fact that the delegate of one of the British Dominions had failed to sign the treaty on behalf of that Dominion would have had no effect on the international operation and obligation of the treaty. Any difficulty so unfortunately resulting would have been a matter for negotiation and settlement within the borders of the Empire itself, but would have in no way affected the external relations between the Empire and the other contracting Powers.

No legislation is required in New Zealand for the purpose of giving effect to the Washington Treaties or Resolutions. The only legislative action required is that of the Imperial Parliament, which will presumably find it expedient to legislate as to the building of ships-of-war for foreign Powers, and as to the criminal liability of persons guilty of violating the rules laid down at Washington for submarine warfare. Legislation as to the first of these matters is needless in New Zealand, and legislation on the second would be beyond the competency of a colonial Legislature as being extra-territorial in its operation.

The Washington Treaties, like all others which are negotiated by plenipotentiaries, come into force only on ratification. The ratification required by the constitutional law of the British Empire is that of His Majesty. No action in New Zealand is legally required. In view, however, of the direct participation of New Zealand in the negotiation and execution of those treaties, it may well be thought expedient that the treaties should be submitted to both Houses of the New Zealand Legislature in order that resolutions may be passed approving of their ratification by His Majesty.

I desire to add that on Armistice Day, immediately before the opening of the Conference, I had the privilege of attending, as the representative of this Dominion, the stately and moving ceremony of the burial at Arlington of America's "Unknown Soldier." On the preceding day at the Capitol, where his body lay in state, I attended along with the representatives of many foreign Governments, and laid a wreath upon his coffin in the name and on behalf of the people and Government of New Zealand.