

25 May, 1911.]

IMPERIAL COUNCIL.

[2nd Day.

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

Dominions themselves to which they attach importance could be provided, with this material difference: that they would have effective and efficient naval strength at an early period, instead of, to put it mildly, an inadequate and uncertain strength being built up over a long period of years.

I have no hesitation whatever in saying with regard to this important question of the Declaration of London (I am not going to discuss it now, of course) that if we had the position regarding the protection of the sea routes properly provided for at points from Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, the Declaration of London, in my opinion, would be a matter of absolutely no consequence at all; because, after all, the whole thing comes back to the superiority of the British Navy in protecting the different parts of the sea routes of the world, to keep the routes open so as to enable the requisite food-supplies to come to this Old Country.

The whole matter is a very important one; the protecting of the widespread and far-reaching interests of the British Empire is worth working for, and I say quite frankly that, even after discussion here, if this should not meet with the acceptance of any single member of the Conference, I will still continue to hold the view that the present position is not right, that an important alteration is necessary. I think I am further right in expressing the opinion that, as the years go on, the voice of the great democracies in the oversea Dominions will not be stopped from advocating that where they are expected, and rightly so, to share in the responsibilities of the troubles that may ensue connected with any war affecting the stability of the British Empire, they are entitled, as a matter of right, not as a matter of appeal, to have some say, even although they be in a minority, upon some properly constituted body that is going to decide the question as to whether there is to be peace or war. My opinion is that they ought to have some representation, and that it ought to be upon a basis that will meet with the general approval of the people of Great Britain and the oversea Dominions.

I will not discuss the matter any further, Mr. Asquith, excepting to say that I know that no scheme for bringing about Imperial unity, that no scheme for establishing a system of organized Imperial Defence, that no scheme for the equitable distribution of the burdens of defence throughout the Empire, and that no scheme for the representation of the self-governing oversea Dominions in an Imperial Council or Parliament of Defence, or for the purpose of dealing with the matters I have suggested, can be brought about in a hurry. I recognise that the proposals I have made are far from perfect, but I believe as certainly as that we men are sitting round this Conference table, that the future will call for an alteration, in the direction at least of what I am suggesting. The growth of these oversea Dominions on attaining the proportions they will within a limited period of years from now, will be such that with the kindest feeling, with the deepest ties of affection to the Old World, the people who are free, independent, and recognise all the values of British institutions, and who value to the full the tremendous protection they have received as the outcome of the payments of the British taxpayers to the coffers of the British Treasury in the general interests of the people in the Old Land as well as the people in the distant portions of the Empire—I say, notwithstanding all that you will find that the strength of those rising oversea democracies in future will be such that their peoples will call for representation, they will call for a voice in determining the all-important question of peace or war, how they are to bear their proportions, and how they are effectually to help in establishing a system of naval defence that will go for maintaining the solidarity of the Empire as a whole, and in reality will go for bringing about and continuing that which every civilised community desires, the peace of the world.

I beg to move the resolution.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Mr. Asquith, the resolution which has been moved by Sir Joseph Ward may be repeated again so that we may understand exactly where we are: "That the Empire has now reached a stage of Imperial development which renders it expedient that there should be an Imperial Council of State with representatives from all the self-governing parts of the Empire, in theory and in fact advisory to the Imperial Government on all questions affecting the interests of His Majesty's Dominions Oversea."