



THE BIG THREE of the 1919 Conference—Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Wilson photographed in Paris on their way to sign the Treaty of Versailles

when ratified by each former enemy and by those of the Four who fought actively against her. The Conference, in short, according to the rules apparently accepted by the Big Four, is a body advisory to them. The small powers represented thereon have no other status than to express their views on a document presented to them a few weeks before, and then to accept the final decision of the Foreign Ministers.

Here, in fact, is the situation which many small powers feared would arise, and which Australia and New Zealand for their part protested against in advance. The Canberra Pact of January 1944 claimed for these Dominions the right to be heard in the formative stage of peacemaking, not merely in comment on an elaborate draft presented for ratification.

Something to be Said for it

In short, the upshot of World War II has been to place supreme power in the hands of a none-too-harmonious group of the strong, who will dominate the peacemaking. Set against the hopes which sustained the spirit of so many through the war the picture is grievous; but viewed in its historical perspective the colour subtly changed. The predominance of the Great Powers was a fact in 1919 and 1815; there is something to be said for a system which makes this plain as opposed to one which enables Great Power responsibility to shelter behind a facade of democratic phraseology. The debates of the Foreign Ministers and of the Security Council—the recriminations and mutual accusations—have the advantages as well as the drawbacks of publicity. The very existence of the Security Council, its constitution and functioning before the peace terms were even drafted, is a factor to be weighed. Last time the League of Nations was wrapped up in the Treaty and took on a separate life

only when the main political issues had been settled.

Again, an outstanding fact of the present situation is delay; and the disadvantages thereof are plain to see in the uncertainties of people awaiting decisions, and in the opportunities for corruption and pressure and even for *coups de force*. Yet delay is not all loss. Some of the main defects of Versailles were due to what we now regard as headlong haste, though at the time the accusation was rather of intolerable delay. Passage of time may not only give a chance for the rifts within the United Nations to heal, but may give a better perspective. It is a common complaint that peacemaking statesmen are often blinded by the past. Almost always senior men, they are pre-occupied with the mistakes of "last time" and their minds are full of the certainties of 20 or 50 years before. Thus the men of 1815 and 1919 have been bitterly criticised because in their backward-looking they missed the rising importance of political and economic nationalisms. To-day there is grave danger that elderly men will frame a settlement that would have been wise in 1919 or even in 1939 but which verges on irrelevance in 1946. Delay may help to bring current realities to light. Factors overlooked in the cut and thrust of Great Power debate and compromise may be seen more clearly by men of smaller nations who have no less to lose than Messrs. Bevin, Molotov and Byrnes, but who are less immersed in immediate world responsibility.

One virtue in the situation is that the smaller powers at least know where they stand. With the limits defined they will not hold false hopes of equality. Their voices need be heard no less, if they have views of their own; though the expression thereof may require patience proportionate to their lack of physical strength.

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