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WHAT OUR DEMAND MEANT

Two outstanding facts emerge from the debate in the British House of Commons on the subject of Dominion representation in international conferences:—

One was the unqualified desire of the House of Commons as expressed in the utterances of Conservatives, Liberals and Laborites to concur in the aspirations of the Dominions whatever those aspirations may be.

The other was the peculiarly difficult diplomatic task created for the British government by Canada's demand for representation at the inter-allied conference.

Of the latter we have a vivid revelation in the remarks of Hon. J. H. Thomas, Secretary of State for the Colonies. He said:

"Anybody with a knowledge of European difficulties arising out of the Dawes report would be the first to admit that we could not turn that conference into a mass meeting. We cabled to the Dominions pointing out the difficulties and asking their help. We made it perfectly clear that upon no consideration would they be committed by any representative of the British government without a full discussion of the agreement. All accepted it except Canada."

What were these difficulties? They may be very readily seen by a reference to the nations that participated in the Treaty of Versailles. It was by reason of the fact that Canada was specially represented at Versailles and signed her name to the treaty that she demanded representation at the inter-allied conference which would in all probability revise the treaty in some important respects. It was perfectly logical ground for Canada to take. Yet if Canada obtained this recognition other small nations might with equal right demand it and there was strong intimation from France that they would demand it.

To realize just what this involved we have only to recall that some thirty states with 64 representatives participated in the Treaty of Versailles and signed their names to it.

Great Britain, France, United States and Japan had each five representatives.

Italy, Belgium and the group comprising the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had each three representatives.

Germany, Greece, Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, Siam, Hedjaz, Poland, Portugal, Roumania, and the Czecho-Slovak republic, had each two.

New Zealand, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay, each had one.

How in the name of reason could the inter-allied conference hope to succeed in its stupendous diplomatic task with all these peoples participating? As Mr. Thomas truly said, the conference could not be turned into a mass meeting. Yet that is precisely what concurrence in Canada's demand means unless means could be found for evading its implications as affecting the right of other signatories to the Treaty of Versailles to corresponding representation. The means were found in the panel system under which the Dominions' representatives alternate with a British representative on the British delegation. It is difficult to see how it could have been managed otherwise.

With the picture now complete it is evident that while Canada was very properly pressing for her place in the diplomatic sun she was in point of fact raising an issue that threatened to wreck the inter-allied conference before it began. Such a peril shows the necessity of finding some means of preventing its recurrence. That will be the task of the Imperial conference to be held in London before the end of the year.

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