

A Speech by Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Laird Borden, K.C., P.C., in the House of Commons on the Treaty of Peace, September 2, 1919.¹

Rt. Hon. Sir ROBERT BORDEN (Prime Minister): I beg to move the following resolution:—

Resolved, that it is expedient that Parliament do approve of the Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany (and the Protocol annexed thereto), which was signed at Versailles on the twenty-eighth day of June, nineteen hundred and nineteen, a copy of which has been laid before Parliament, and which was signed on behalf of His Majesty, acting for Canada, by the plenipotentiaries therein named, and that this House do approve of the same.

The Character of the War

He said: Mr. Speaker, we are still too near to the tremendous and terrible events through which the world has passed since August five years ago to realize fully their supreme significance in the world's history and their all-compelling influence upon the future destiny of humanity. The conflicts of a thousand years fade into relative insignificance when compared with this struggle in which for one or another purpose the entire manhood, and more than that, the entire womanhood, of the belligerent nations were engaged. This war numbers its dead by millions, and its maimed and wounded by tens of millions. It surpassed all previous conflicts in the extraordinary extent to which applied science and the control of mankind over the mighty forces of nature were brought into play for purposes of destruction. It overthrew and destroyed the most formidable and highly organized military power known in the world's history; it crumbled thrones, and sent kings and princes wandering as outcasts far from the places they once occupied; it tested, as never before, the courage and self-control of all the nations; and finally it seemed to shake the very foundations upon which organized society has slowly and, as we thought, securely, established itself during a score of centuries.

It was a war, not of armies but of nations; and yet if we mistake not it was something more. If we cannot perceive in its genesis an inevitable clash between two strongly opposed and mutually destructive ideals, and in its issue the triumph of reasoned justice and ordered liberty; if, out of its limitless sacrifice, mankind may not gain redemption from such unendurable horrors in the future, where can we see one ray of hope to lighten the pathway that lies before the nations?

Thirty-two Nations Adopt the Treaty

We are assembled to consider terms of peace which were presented to Germany after many anxious months of study and debate. Including the British Dominions,

(1) The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany was signed at Versailles on June 28, 1919. A special session of Parliament was summoned on September 1, 1919, in order that the Canadian Government might submit the Treaty to Parliament before advising its ratification in respect of the Dominion of Canada.