

that closer imperial relations would inflame French-Canadian opinion, Laurier charged the Australian with endangering dominion self-government. The debate raged for days, but Laurier, whom Deakin later denounced for his "fifth-rate part in the Conference," defiantly stood his ground.⁷

For the moment, this fundamental difference over how the empire might be organized precluded close relations. Even the election in 1911 of a Conservative and imperially-minded prime minister, Sir Robert Borden, had little immediate impact on Canada's wary approach to imperial issues. However, the swirling passions that accompanied the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 swept away many Canadian doubts about the value of the empire. The country plunged into battle alongside Australia and the other overseas dominions. The war revived the debate over imperial organization. This time, however, Canada and Australia were firmly united in pursuit of identical goals.

The war placed dominion governments in an awkward position. Although they remained responsible for the nature of their national contribution to the allied cause, Britain retained complete control over strategy and high policy. During the initial stages of the conflict, when it was thought that the war would only last a few months, this state of affairs was perfectly acceptable. But as the war dragged on and its horrifying scale became apparent, a number of dominion premiers became restive and uneasy. During a visit to London in 1915, Borden began to wage a campaign intended to force the British government to keep the dominions more fully informed of the war's progress. Early the following year, the newly-elected Australian prime minister, W.M. Hughes, joined Borden's crusade. After a brief meeting in Ottawa, the two agreed on a broadly similar set of dominion objectives.

Borden and Hughes proved a formidable team. They readily convinced the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, of the need to establish formal mechanisms to facilitate consultation between Britain and the dominions. An Imperial War Conference invited dominion prime ministers to consider the general problem of imperial relations, while an Imperial War Cabinet gave them a direct voice in the conduct of the war. The initial struggle for greater dominion status was successfully concluded in April 1917 when the Imperial War Conference recognized "the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth . . . [with a right to] an adequate voice in foreign policy and foreign relations."⁸ A year later, this theoretical expression of dominion sovereignty assumed practical significance when Borden and Hughes joined forces again to secure separate dominion representation at the Paris Peace Conference.

The success enjoyed by Hughes and Borden in demonstrating that British and dominion interests could be accommodated within a single imperial foreign policy provided a temporary basis for continued Australian-Canadian cooperation. From the start, however, the postwar relationship was tense.