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Canada and the Conference

(Grattan O'Leary in MacLean's Magazine)

On November 11, anniversary of the fateful day when the Prussian dream of "Weltmacht" culminated in catastrophic defeat, there shall convene in Washington a congress of the statesmen of the great powers of the world. The purpose of the gathering will be two-fold. It will seek to achieve settlement of Pacific problems upon a basis of understanding and good will; and it will endeavor to attain what has been for centuries the dream of humanity's best minds—disarmament and peace in the world.

The momentous character of the gathering being clear, the question arises: Shall Canada have a voice in its deliberations and decisions? To such a question, there can be for Canadians, but one reply. It is that, judged by any vital test that may be applied, Canada's right to be heard at Washington cannot be denied.

Canada, to begin with, is a Pacific Power. She has a thousand miles of seaboard, and two of her largest ports, on the Pacific; in any important conflict in that part of the world she would be a probable theatre of war. Manifestly, therefore, she has a direct and vital interest in any Pacific settlement or scheme; an interest more direct and vital than that of any other single nation outside of the United States and Japan.

Moreover, as a part of the British Empire, whose interests in the Orient are vast, Canada has an additional right to be heard. Her statesmen, having claimed a voice in the Empire's foreign policy, having laid it down that no step which concerns the whole British Commonwealth shall be taken without the Dominions' advice and consent, cannot now logically forego this claim in a decision of such moment and scope. Not unless the proclamations of national status, made loudly and often in the past two years, were mere pretensions and shams.

Canada was the Originator

But there is a claim more powerful still. It is that without Canada's stand at the Imperial Conference, and even at an earlier date, this Pacific-Disarmament conference might never have been held. The simple truth—and this can be substantiated by official and ascertainable fact—is that as early as February 14, 1921, the present government, acting through the Canadian department of external affairs, believing that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance ought not to be renewed, communicated its views to the British government, and suggested that the United States government be approached as to whether it would be willing to agree to a conference on Pacific affairs with Great Britain and Japan. The suggestion, it is known, was not acted upon at the time. The British government, although favorable to what was proposed, evidently believed that the difficulties in the way were greater than the Canadian government supposed; the position of Australia, believed at that time to be strongly in favor of

renewing the Japanese Alliance, was cited as an obstacle; and the question was temporarily dropped.

Canada, however, adhered to its view. The debate in the house of commons in April, indicating hostility to the Alliance, followed by editorials of similar tone in the press, served to strengthen the government's position, and when Mr. Meighen reached London in June it was with mind firmly made up against renewal of the Treaty and for a Pacific conference instead.

It cannot be said that he found London any too sympathetic to his views. Mr. Hughes, of Australia, and Mr. Massey, of New Zealand, with opinions shaped—and perhaps pardonably so—by the geographical position of their Dominions, wanted the Alliance renewed. Their position was that the Treaty had worked well, that it had maintained peace in the Pacific, that Japan had been a faithful Ally, that the substance of such a fact should not be abandoned for a shadow and that, above all, Japan, which had stood by the Empire during the war, and which had been faithful to its compact, should not now be "thrown to the dogs." It was an argument not without strength! and it enlisted powerful supporters both in the British government and press.

Mr. Lloyd George, there is reason to believe, favored the Alliance being renewed, as did Mr. Churchill and Mr. Balfour; practically every powerful British newspaper, including the Times, the Morning Post, the Daily Telegraph and the Observer, took the same view (they wanted a treaty in a modified form); and beyond question renewal would have triumphed easily had it not been for Canadian opposition. Mr. Meighen, who secured a measure of support from General Smuts, put his case with great force and persistence.

"The logic of his appeal was irresistible, and in the end it triumphed. The devotees of the 'Old Diplomacy' could summon little enthusiasm for a step so foreign to the traditions of the European chancelleries, and had little faith in its results. Nevertheless, the United States and Japanese embassies were asked to 'sound out' their respective governments regarding what Mr. Meighen proposed; and a week later President Harding issued his history-making invitation for a Conference. Canada's position had achieved a signal victory."

Will Canada Be Left Out

It is surely the essence of irony that the nation which thus clearly originated the idea of a Conference which fought for it and which alone made it possible, should now be excluded from that Conference's deliberations. Yet such at the time of writing, at all events, is the position in which Canada finds herself. President Harding, in issuing his invitations, forgot about this Dominion. Perhaps he was ignorant of what took place at the Imperial Conference. Perhaps he overlooked the fact that we have a vital interest in the Pacific; perhaps he does not know that we claim to be a nation. At all events, Canada was not included in the list of those invited, and the reason given, in a semi-official statement, was this:

"If the British Empire should be represented at the Conference by separate delegations of the Imperial government and the governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, with five delegates each these twenty-five representatives, would have the power to compel the United States, with five delegates to accept any proposal advanced by the British contingent."

This, of course, is absurd. It is absurd because it is perfectly certain that nobody ever contemplated five delegates for each portion of the Empire, or anything like that number. On the contrary, it is not probable that the British government will be represented by more than two or three delegates; and the Dominions would never ask more than one delegate each. However, the myth of the "six British votes" in the League Assembly, is resurrected in another form. Canada, for the moment, is barred.

The situation, therefore, is this: that the only way by which Canada

can gain admittance to this Conference which she originated, and whose decisions shall mean much to her, is by securing a place on the British delegation. It was by such means, it will be remembered, that Sir Robert Borden, acting as one of the British panel, sat in the Peace Conference at Versailles; and the same plan can be followed again. Direct representation would, of course, be more satisfactory, more in keeping with our part in promoting the conference, and a greater concession to our national pride, but on the international stage, as in other spheres, half a loaf is better than no bread. Hence it is to be hoped that the placing of a Canadian representative on the British delegation has already engaged Mr. Meighen and Mr. Lloyd George.

Nor should this country be kept from Washington by the pressure of problems at home. Nothing that any ministry can do, in the way of domestic policy can possibly compare in importance with the decisions that are possible there; not even at Versailles itself was a greater opportunity offered for the promotion of good for the world. Because of this, because of what took place in London, and because Canada would stand at the Conference as an interpreter of British ideas to Americans and American ideas to Britons, thus soothing the way toward agreement, a Canadian voice must be heard at Washington.

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