

# South by East

## A FEW STEPS ON THE ROAD TO WASHINGTON

THE presence of Sir Robert Borden at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 was important to the development of Canadian autonomy in the conduct and control of foreign relations. For the first time Canada was represented at a major world conference by a delegate with plenipotential status. Nonetheless, it is an over-simplification to claim that Versailles was the Canadian coming-of-age party. It is similarly over-simple to suggest, in keeping with the Canadian mythology, that the true advent of Canadian autonomy came during the ensuing decade with Mackenzie King's rejection of the twin conceptions of an Imperial Cabinet continuing out of the Imperial War Cabinet and of a unified imperial foreign policy. Rather, the development of Canadian autonomy in foreign affairs has been a long, slow process which began as early as 1870 and continued until the end of the Second World War, if not longer. It is only after the complexity of the development of Canadian autonomy has been recognized that a reasonable understanding of that phenomenon can be attained.

One issue that demonstrates this complexity is the establishment of Canadian representation at Washington. The movement began under the Borden Government, was continued by Meighen, and was concluded by King. In 1917, when the exigencies of the war made it desirable to have Canadian representation at Washington, the Canadian War Mission was established. It was recognized at the time that, while the Mission would meet the needs of the situation for the duration of the war, it would be necessary to reconsider the whole question of representation after the conclusion of hostilities. <sup>(1)</sup>

### An Early Memorandum

During the Peace Conference, a paper entitled "Memorandum from the Dominion Prime Ministers on the Dominions' Rights of Legation" was drawn up. Although this paper reached a fairly final form in its third draft, there is apparently no evidence that it was ever formally presented to Lloyd George, the British Government or the British Empire delegation at Paris. The first draft, which was completed on February 6, 1919, read :

"1. The Dominion Prime Ministers are convinced that the time has come when the right of the Dominions to send diplomatic envoys to foreign states should be recognized, and that the appropriate steps should be taken immediately in order that this right may be exercised.

"2. They consider that any provision made for this purpose should not only take into account the necessity for preserving the unity of the British

(1) See *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, Ottawa. (The Queen's Printer), 1968. Volume I, Documents 25-37, Pp. 24-35.