

Mr Byrnes, in the Commission on Procedure on 6 August, stated:—

“ Ever since the Potsdam Agreement we have encountered at every step Soviet determination to restrict the right to make peace to the fewest possible number of Great Powers. At London in September the issue was the Soviet desire to exclude France and China from any part in drafting the Balkan treaties. At Moscow the Soviet Government fought stubbornly for the smallest number of participants in this Conference. The struggle then moved on to fixing the powers of the Conference and its procedure, culminating in this effort, while the Conference is in session, to have the Council meet to dictate even the officials of the Conference.”

Thus the U.S.S.R. clearly had little reason to believe that the Conference would make positive recommendations which would advance her interests and, having failed to convince the U.S. and the U.K. that the non-Big-Four nations at the Conference should do no more than state their views, the Soviet Union naturally concentrated on preserving the gains she had already secured in the Council of Foreign Ministers by making it as difficult as possible for the Conference to pass a recommendation.

The Soviet diplomats, forced against their will into a twenty-one-nation conference at which they were certain to be outvoted, prepared their position before the Conference opened. They won their first victory when their three colleagues agreed that the Conference should be a body with power only to recommend changes in the draft treaties for the consideration of the Council of Foreign Ministers, not to prepare and decide upon the final texts. They won their second victory when it was agreed that none of the Big Four should submit amendments at the Conference to the agreed clauses of the draft treaties. They won their third victory when they secured agreement that all the Four Powers should support the agreed clauses during the Conference, and that all should vote against any proposal to amend the agreed clauses of the draft treaties if any *one* of the Four disapproved of that amendment. This was a central point in the dispute over voting procedure. For, when agreed clauses were considered by the full Conference, the votes of four of the twenty-one were committed in advance. Had it not been for this prior commitment of the Four Powers a two-thirds majority procedure would have been more acceptable to the small powers.

The arrangement meant, in effect, that any amendment to an agreed clause put forward by the “ Western ” Powers was automatically opposed by at least nine votes (U.S.S.R., U.K., U.S.A., France, Ukraine, Byelo-Russia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia)—that is, sufficient to prevent it securing a two-thirds majority. The position of any amendments to agreed clauses put forward by the “ Eastern Bloc ” was even more hopeless. In this way, therefore, the Peace Conference of the twenty-one belligerent nations was assured of near-impotence before it opened because the agreed clauses covered most of the important questions.