

D.O.3a.

A. Mui Esq.

103

No. *F 720/114*

Subject:

Raapu: berferano

Reference to previous correspondence:

With the compliments of

Mr. Rice

A copy has also been sent to

*Maj. Gault
Maj. Graves
Maj. Sears
Mr. Balfour
Wing Cdr. Foster.*

Dominions Office, Downing Street,

6 MAY 1939

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(R5052) Wt 32346/3556 5,000 2/36 H & Sr Gp 640
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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
SIR THOMAS INSKIP,

COPY.

CONFIDENTIAL.

No. 7.

WELLINGTON,

27th March, 1939

Sir,

I have the honour to report that the announcement here on the 12th March of the forthcoming meeting in Wellington of representatives of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, to discuss Pacific questions of common concern, with special reference to defence questions, has been welcomed by all sections of opinion, as represented in the press of New Zealand. Especial gratification has been felt, and expressed, that the initiative in suggesting the Conference came from the New Zealand Government. The Opposition have taken this part of the statement as a satisfactory sign that the Government are no longer indifferent to the responsibilities of the Dominion as a partner in the defence of the Empire, whilst the Labour Party's organ has acclaimed this further evidence of the "enlightened leadership of Mr. Savage, always a staunch advocate of the principle of collective security", and considers the Conference an effective reply to those who criticize the Government for insufficient attention to defence problems.

2. The most interesting of the press articles so far occasioned by the Conference is one in the Christchurch "Press". In welcoming the statement, this paper suggests that Imperial Conferences are dominated to such an extent by the political situation prevailing at the time in each of the Empire countries that the conclusions represent the minimum rather than the maximum of constructive collective action of which the Commonwealth is capable: regional conferences on such matters as do not concern all Members of the Commonwealth, such as shipping in the Pacific or African problems, may therefore provide more hopeful prospects of successful co-operat

copy of the article is enclosed.

3. It is noteworthy that all the press comment which has so far appeared has concentrated on the defence aspect of the proposed discussions, to the exclusion of other Pacific problems.

4. Although the New Zealand Government are undoubtedly eager for the Conference to supply them with the answers to various specific defence questions to which I have referred in telegraphic correspondence, Ministers have not so far indicated in their conversations with me that they attach as great importance to the proceedings as do the Service Departments. The latter hope above all that the mere holding of the Conference in the Dominion will encourage the public to take more interest in defence questions than they have up to now displayed.

5. Possibly a subsidiary result will be to bring home to the New Zealand administration, as the headquarters of the Conference, both the difficulty and the importance of obtaining agreement, even on day-to-day matters, between the various delegations - a point which, as visitors to Imperial Conferences in London or Ottawa, they have probably never yet the opportunity of contacts with oversea delegations which will be fully appreciated. Not the least advantage will be afforded to many Service officers and members of the Public Service. These cannot fail to broaden their outlook on Imperial problems.

I have, etc.,

(Sgd) H. F. BATTERBEE.

High Commissioner.

Extract from "The Christchurch Press"

dated 14th March, 1939.

A REGIONAL IMPERIAL CONFERENCE

The conference of representatives of the British, Australian, and New Zealand Governments which will meet in Wellington shortly to discuss Pacific defence problems may be the beginning of an interesting and important development in the technique of Imperial relationships. Particularly since 1931, there has been a growing feeling that Imperial Conferences, although useful for the personal contacts they establish among the political leaders and high officials of the British Commonwealth, are unsatisfactory as a means of securing effective joint action. The apparent success of the Ottawa Conference in securing the adoption of an Imperial scheme of reciprocal trade preferences does not invalidate this criticism, since the Ottawa system is gradually being discarded and there is no desire for another conference on the model of Ottawa. For the failure of Imperial Conferences to produce results in the sphere of constructive action there are two main reasons. One is that, although experts and officials are in attendance, the conferences are invariably dominated by political considerations. Almost invariably, what determines the attitude of the Prime Minister of a Dominion to any proposal is, not the benefits to the Commonwealth which may result from its adoption, but the effect of its adoption upon the immediate political situation in his own country. But the more important reason is that the Imperial Conferences assume a homogeneity of social and economic structure, of interests, and of ideals among the nations of the Commonwealth which in fact does not exist. They assume wrongly that the same unanimity which has been achieved in the past in the development of the

constitutional

constitutional relations of the nations of the Commonwealth is possible also in trade relations, in foreign policy, and in defence. Combined with the need for unanimous decisions, this assumption has reduced the achievements of most conferences to the evolution of formulae too vague to be of practical value. The pace of any conference is dictated by its most reluctant member. The decisions of Imperial Conferences represent, therefore, the minimum rather than the maximum of constructive collective action of which the British Commonwealth is capable. The problem is to find a technique of co-operation which, without supplanting the Imperial Conference, will better express the essential unity of the Commonwealth; and it may be that the New Zealand Government, as the original promoter of the Pacific defence conference, has shown the way to a partial solution of the problem. This conference is a practical recognition of the important fact that, within the British Commonwealth, there are interest groups which constitute the best basis for collective action. In this instance, it has been realised that Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and the British colonies in the Pacific have a common defence problem. The Pacific shipping problem creates another group consisting of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In Africa, the defence problem has emphasised the community of interest among Great Britain, the Union of South Africa, the Rhodesias, and the British colonies and mandated territories in Africa. The other peculiarity of the Pacific defence conference attributable mainly to the need for haste and the technical nature of the questions it will discuss, is that it will be made up entirely of experts and permanent officials. For that reason, its decisions can be no more than recommendations to the governments concerned; but it is probable that it will lead to speedier action than a conference of plenipotentiaries. Its order of reference is, of course, limited to defence; but

defence,

defence, in the modern world is not merely or even mainly a matter of armies, navies, and air forces. There seems at least a possibility that the governments represented at the Pacific defence conference will by degrees be drawn into collective action on problems of trade, industrial production and foreign policy by the same necessities which have drawn them into collective action on the defence problem.