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THE
COMMONWEALTH
CONFERENCE
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By
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MR. Grant Dexter, associate editor of the Winnipeg *Free Press*, attended the conference of Prime Ministers of the British Commonwealth in London in May, 1944, and sent a number of very informative despatches at the time. Upon his return, he wrote the series of articles that are herewith reproduced, on the position of each of the British nations in regard to Commonwealth relations, the confirmation of the policy of a free association of its members, and their united support for a world organization for the maintenance of peace.

ISSUES IN BALANCE

THE importance of the Prime Ministers' Conference, which met in London May 1 to 17, can be tested very simply.

The conference took place at a time described by Mr. Churchill as "the most deadly climax" of the war. Post-war policy in the widest concept was the chief question to be discussed. This discussion would follow from the Atlantic Charter, the Declaration of the United Nations, and the Moscow Declaration (Article Four) which recognized):

"... the necessity of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organization, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace-loving nations, and open to membership of all such states, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security."

The structure of this international organization had already been studied by the Big Four and a further meeting to draft the final plan, it had been announced, would be held in the near future.

The British government, it was made known, had prepared a plan. It may be assumed that the other Commonwealth governments had been similarly engaged.

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BUT before the British government entered these further, and perhaps final, negotiations it was desirable that there should be a meeting of the heads of the Commonwealth governments. It may be assumed that whatever plan the British experts had devised, it would not be finally adopted until the views of the other governments had been obtained.

Thus, the first task of this conference was to discuss what kind of post-war world organization is desired. And it follows that the nature of this organization will be profoundly affected by the discussions.

Thus it is not too much to say that the future of the world was in the balance at London. True, the British government is but one of the Big Four or, more practically, the Big Three. But if the Commonwealth governments had found against a world organization of sovereign states open to all freedom-loving nations, large or small, and in favor of a world to be ruled by Titan powers then, obviously, the chances of a world society of nations would have been slim. Alternatively, of course, it does not follow that the wishes of the government of the United Kingdom will be accepted by the United States and Russia, but it is obvious that agreement at London has immeasurably improved the prospect of success. It is, perhaps, too much to say that the new world was born at London; but it did not miscarry and its chances of lusty birth later on were vastly improved.

This, then, is the test of the importance of the London conference. The prime ministers might have decided one way or another. Whichever way, the marks of their decision would not soon have vanished from the earth.

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IF the five prime ministers who met at London had been all of one mind and if their positions had been clearly defined before the conference assembled, the issue

would never have been in doubt and there would be no occasion for comment. Indeed, apart from short term questions of war policy and the like, there would have been no purpose in holding the conference. The British government would have gone into the negotiations with the United States and Russia confident that its views were acceptable to the other governments of the Commonwealth.

But when the conference assembled on May 1, there was no assurance of unanimity. Only one government — the Canadian government—had defined its position clearly. Mr. King did so in the House of Commons on January 31, 1944. He then declared in favor of the kind of world organization forecast in the Moscow Declaration and against any kind of Commonwealth centralization looking to a post-war world to be ruled by Titans (of which a unified commonwealth would be one). Collaboration and consultation—yes; unification in any form of empire institution or otherwise—no.

In South Africa, Field Marshal Smuts on March 17 had come down against either a closer or a looser Commonwealth structure. He favored the existing arrangement. Yet Prime Minister Smuts' speech of last November, with its strong anti-Soviet bias and its emphasis on power, tended to make his position doubtful.

In Australia, Prime Minister Curtin stood for an Empire secretariat and talked much of unity. This seemed to be in contrast with Australia's past nationalistic attitude. In New Zealand, Prime Minister Fraser had blessed the Halifax speech of January 24, which had called for Common-

wealth unity and had looked forward to a world to be ruled by a few Titan powers, of which the Commonwealth was to be one. Moreover, New Zealand had a tradition of Empire consolidation. New Zealand and Canada in the early years of the century had been at opposite extremes.

The attitude of the United Kingdom government was uncertain. True, the British government was a party to the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations declaration, and the Moscow agreement. But these were couched in general terms. Speaking on the Moscow conference in the British House of Commons last November 11, Rt. Hon. Anthony Eden declared Secretary of State Hull to be the parent of Article Four. He used language which could have indicated that the British government did not take the article very seriously. Lord Halifax is a member of the British government and his speech certainly was not reassuring.

There have been many debates at Westminster on Commonwealth organization, and in all of them there was noticeable a strong body of opinion favoring some form of Empire centralization. Indeed, in the debate in the House of Commons on April 20 and 21, on the eve of the conference, Mr. Churchill himself was not clear. His language could be construed as supporting either viewpoint. In this debate, in particular, the Canadian position as defined by Mr. King was regarded as extreme. Members kept on saying that "even Canada" might agree to this or the other proposition. Certainly the debate offered ground for the belief that the British government might not be in

agreement with the Canadian government but, on the contrary, might favor some kind of a centralist policy—the Curtin plan or another.

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THE event, however, proved that the Commonwealth governments are in agreement in favoring a world organization comprising all freedom-loving states, great and small. There was no important section of opinion in favor of centralization. Australia had been misunderstood. The tradition of nationalism, if anything, runs deeper than ever in that Dominion. It now takes the form, as will be explained in later articles, of desiring to place the power of the Commonwealth as a unit at the command of Australia in the

South Pacific. Finding no support from any other part of the Commonwealth, the Australian proposal was pigeon-holed and Mr. Curtin signed the official statement issued at the conclusion of the conference. This statement, as will be shown, destroys the Australian policy. It destroys, as well, any policy calling for a common policy or a single voice for the Commonwealth.

New Zealand was not the opponent but the colleague of Canada. The United Kingdom lined up with the others.

And so the conference agreed to work for a post-war world organization of sovereign states of which, of course, the British nations would, each of them, be members in their own right.

FUTURE WORLD ORDER

WHAT kind of a world organization was approved at the London conference by the prime ministers of the Commonwealth?

No precise answer to this question is available, but there have been several declarations which give a fairly clear outline of the kind of organization the Commonwealth desires. To begin with, there is a reference in the statement issued at the close of the conference on May 17:

“We affirm that after the war a world organization to maintain peace and security should be set up and endowed with the necessary power and authority to prevent aggression and violence.”

The communique affirms that unity was achieved but, most sig-

nificantly, adds that “that unity finds its strength not in any formal bond but in the hidden springs from which human action flows.” “Our system” is described as one of “free association.” Most important of all, the statement pronounces against a common or single Commonwealth foreign policy. It says: “We have also examined together the principles which determine our foreign policies and their application to current problems.” The word is “policies,” not “policy.”

There are references to future world organization in Mr. King’s address to the Houses of Parliament, but the language is not specific and adds nothing to the

statement of the conference.

Prime Ministers Curtin and Fraser both endorsed the world organization policy in their speeches at the closing session of the conference. But they, too, added nothing to the statement.

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PRIME Minister Smuts of South Africa, however, revealed more detail. Referring to the world organization, he said (Birmingham, May 19):

"It would almost inevitably be an improved and reformed version of the old League of Nations. That brave and brilliant improvisation failed in part largely because it was not clothed with sufficient authority and coercive power to maintain peace. Next time responsibility should be placed on those who have the power, and the great powers who won the war should be made responsible in the first instance for keeping the peace—at least for the transition period, until a more permanent scheme for effective police supervision could be worked out."

He went on to argue for regional groupings among nations, but with an emphasis markedly different from that of his speech of last November. Then he advocated the federation of the small European democracies with the United Kingdom. He seemed, in November, to be alarmed by the prospect of Russia "bestriding" Europe. This time he talked of a European federation, but apparently exclusive of the United Kingdom. He grouped the British Commonwealth with the United States. The text of Prime Minister Smuts' speech rather indicates that where he spoke of the world organization he had in mind the discussions at the conference, but that his views on federations and regional groupings were his own.

A STILL more specific statement on post-war world organization appears in the closing part of Prime Minister Churchill's speech in the House of Commons at Westminster on May 24. He said that this matter was "very prominent at the conference just concluded."

Mr. Churchill said:

"We intend to set up a world order and organization equipped with all the necessary attributes of power to prevent future wars or the planning of them in advance by restless and ambitious nations. For this purpose of preventing wars there must be a world controlling council. I am not talking about other purposes, but for the purpose of preventing wars there must be a world council comprising the greatest states which emerge victorious from this war, who will be obligated to keep within certain minimum standards of armaments for the purpose of maintaining peace; there must be also a world assembly of powers whose relations to the world executive or controlling power for the purpose of maintaining peace I am in no position to define. If I did, I should be stepping outside the bounds which are proper to us and our Allies. The establishment of these bodies and their relations with each other can only be settled after the formidable foes we are now facing have been beaten down and reduced to complete submission. It would be presumption for any one power to try to prescribe in precise detail exactly what solution we should find. . . . We must undoubtedly in our world structure embody a great deal of all we have gained for the world by the structure and form of the League of Nations."

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IT was common knowledge at London that the prime ministers worked out a fairly complete plan for the post-war world

organization. Few details are available because the final negotiations with the United States and Russia have still to take place, and no good purpose could be served by announcing detailed plans in advance.

Particularly interesting is the distinction suggested by Mr. Churchill between the prevention of war and other matters coming before a world organization. He seemed to indicate that the world council—comprising only the great powers—would have exclusive jurisdiction with respect to the prevention of war, and that the world assembly would deal with other international matters. Mr. Eden, speaking in the same debate on May 25, enunciated five principles which would govern the future world organization:

“The organization must have the necessary force to prevent a recurrence of aggression, and to ensure this there must be close collaboration between the United States, the Soviet Union, the British Commonwealth, China and other powers. Responsibility in the future world organization must be related to power and consequently should be constructed on and around the four great powers with all other peace-loving states playing their part, and so on.”

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BOTH Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden were speaking in a debate on foreign policy. Therefore it would be inadvisable to scan their language too closely with respect to the conference and the future organization of the Commonwealth. But while this is true,

there are definite declarations in Mr. Churchill's text, and implications in Mr. Eden's references to post-war organization which, to say the least, require further elucidation. Mr. Churchill seemed to believe that peace in the future will be maintained by a council comprising only the great powers, among which he seemed to include the Commonwealth as a unit. Mr. Eden did not repeat Mr. Churchill's formula. On the contrary, he included the small powers in the world organization whose task it will be to preserve peace. Like Mr. Churchill, however, he used language which is open to the interpretation that he thinks of the Commonwealth as a unit, operating in the world as one of the great powers.

The achievements of the conference, however, are not to be found in speeches which, at best, are opinions expressed by members of only one of the five governments.

The only official report of the conference is the statement issued on May 17 and signed by all five prime ministers. This statement, as already pointed out, disposes summarily of the idea that the Commonwealth is a unit or can be represented by a single policy.

The kind of a world organization approved by the conference, therefore, is one which stems directly from Article Four of the Moscow pact— an organization open to all freedom-loving nations, large and small. The British nations, undoubtedly, will become full-fledged members in their own right.

THE AUSTRALIAN VIEW

WHILE the London conference ended in agreement, it is of interest to examine the viewpoints of each member of the Commonwealth.

The best starting point is Australia. The common opinion in Canada prior to the conference was based on the speeches delivered by Mr. Curtin in August and December of last year, and the Australian-New Zealand agreement of January, 1944. First Mr. Curtin advocated an empire council and later on an empire secretariat. These speeches and the agreement received much publicity in Canada and, in Imperialist quarters, were freely interpreted as meaning that Mr. Curtin favored greater Commonwealth unity in the sense of a common foreign policy to be expressed by power greater than she alone could muster, to the end that interests which Australia regards as vital shall be more surely protected in the future. Prior to the conference, therefore, Mr. Curtin was widely hailed as the prophet of empire consolidation. But as the full implications of his proposals became clear, the shouting speedily subsided and, before the conference closed, had quite died away.

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AUSTRALIA'S attitude merits sympathetic study because it is the result of experiences through which Australians have passed. If Canada had endured similar perils in this war it is very doubtful if a Canadian government would have shown greater restraint than Australia.

The roots of Mr. Curtin's coun-

cil or secretariat proposal are to be found in Australia's experience since Dec. 7, 1941. The story is told in a statement issued by Mr. Curtin on May 4 and supplemented by him at a press conference on the same day.

Australia, while strongly nationalistic, has always been ultraloyal to the British connection. Australians, though they be second generation native-born, commonly refer to England as "home." Australia is over 90 per cent pure British stock. Bearing these facts in mind, the Curtin statement takes on special significance.

The statement recounts that:

"Australia had been nurtured in a conception of Empire defence in which it accepted the responsibility to do all that it could for its own local defence. It also depended on British sea-power to deter aggression or to aid in defeating an invasion of the Commonwealth by attacking the lines of communication of the enemy and keeping open those by which reinforcements and supplies could be sent to Australia. Conversely, if there were no serious threat to Australia, its forces would be available to defend the vital areas on the principle of mutual support. The exercise of British sea-power depended on adequate naval strength and the secure defence of strategically located bases which could be used by the British fleet. The base of cardinal importance to the defence of Australia was Singapore. These were the basic principles which governed the security of Australia when she entered the war with Britain in September, 1939. On the assumption of their absolute validity, Australia concentrated on the maximum contribution it could make to the fighting fronts overseas."

The statement proceeds to describe events prior to Dec. 7, 1941. The Australian navy was scattered over "the seven seas of the world." Land forces totalling 122,000 men were sent to the Middle East. They fought in Africa, Greece, Crete and Syria. Twenty thousand airmen and air trainees were sent abroad. After Dunkirk, Australia stripped herself of small arms and ammunition and shipped them to the United Kingdom. An army division was also diverted to the United Kingdom. As the Japanese menace became greater, Australia still further weakened her home defences by sending airmen and army units to Malaya, New Caledonia, Timor, the Solomons, and so on.

The onset of the Japanese, therefore, caught Australia unprepared and virtually defenceless. All she had was an inadequately armed militia and some 50 bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. To the Australians, the plight of Britain in June, 1940, was not as grave as that of Australia in March, 1942. Twice the Curtin statement declares that "No country faced a greater danger with less resources than Australia."

As the Japanese swept southward towards Australia, an acute difference of view arose between the Australian and the United Kingdom governments. Australia did not dispute the wisdom of the

decision to beat the Germans first, but disagreed fundamentally with the failure to provide sufficient power to make certain that Australia would be held as a base for the ultimate offensive against Japan. If Australia had been conquered, it would have been "a disastrous blow." In Australia's view, the requirements necessary to hold Australia "were relatively small in relation to the resources of the United Nations, and did not appear sufficient to have a vital influence in another theatre."

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THE statement notes that Mr. Churchill repeatedly emphasized the immensity of the task of defeating a Germany which controlled Europe. But what about Japan which had become the master of vast territories in the Pacific with large populations and vital resources for the waging of war? The statement refers with "satisfaction" to the ultimate decision to place the two wars—east and west—on a parity and it records, without comment, that in March, 1942, Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt decided that the United States would become responsible for the Pacific war. "It followed, therefore, that we had to look to the United States for the aid to supplement our own efforts." There is irony in this statement, having regard to the faith in Empire defence in which Australia was "nurtured."

AUSTRALIAN DIFFICULTIES

IT is clear that Australia disagreed fundamentally with the war strategy adopted by Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt in 1941. It is clear, also, that this decision finally was reversed. But what Australians cannot forget is that their country might have been conquered by the Japs as a result of the 1941 decision. It is small solace to know that you have been right all along if, meantime, Australia had been conquered and its people had passed under the heel of the most bestial soldiers of modern times.

This explains much in the present attitude of Australia. But there is a further factor. The machinery of consultation between Canberra and London functioned badly. The decision by which Australia was required to look for aid not to the Empire but to the United States first reached Australia by newspaper reports. The Curtin government first learned of it in their newspapers. They had received no despatches, knew nothing of the reasons back of it. At this gravest hour in their history they might—for all they knew—have not been part of the Commonwealth at all.

It will be recalled that under much less exasperating circumstances in the last war, Sir Robert Borden wrote a letter to the government of the United Kingdom pointing out that he was receiving far more information about the war from newspapers than from the despatches. He found this intolerable and said so. Yet Canada, unlike Australia in 1942, was in no direct peril at all.

THEN there was the Cairo conference on Nov. 22-26, 1943, between President Roosevelt, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Mr. Churchill and their respective military and diplomatic advisers. This conference dealt with the war in the Pacific.

For reasons never made clear Australia, and no doubt the other Dominions, were not consulted or informed about this conference until it was over. There was a complete, an incredible breakdown in the machinery of consultation.

Again the effect on Australia was profound. Australia had saved herself largely by her own exertions and at a terrible price. She had done so while her soldiers, sailors and airmen were far away fighting the battles of the Empire: the Empire, incidentally, which had directed her, in the hour of crucifixion, to look to the United States for succour. In saving herself, with United States' aid, Australia had saved the South Pacific and the war in the Far East. Yet when the future course of this war and the treatment to be given Japan came up for discussion, Australia was ignored.

This background is essential to an understanding of the Australian point of view. The wonder is that Mr. Curtin was not more difficult than he was.

What would have been the state of public opinion in Canada if this country had gone through a similar experience? It will be recalled with what insistence British Columbia demanded defence troops in the early months of 1942. What if no troops had been available; only

a half-armed militia? What if all our fighting men and all our equipment had been sent thousands of miles away to fight another foe? And what would Canadians have thought if, after escaping conquest and destruction by a supreme effort and the aid of a non-British nation, the future course of the war had been decided without so much as a nod of recognition to us? Any Canadian who can imagine what his thought would be under such circumstances, will sympathize with the Australian viewpoint.

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HAVING thus put the Australian point of view, it is necessary to qualify it in one important particular. The system of consultation between Canberra and London did not fail in March, 1942. Rather it was not used. It did work between other Dominion capitals and London. The fault, evidently, lay with Australia's lack of a proper department of external affairs. Australia's establishment in this regard does not, for example, compare with that of Canada. Hence Mr. Curtin's emphasis on personnel, on a secretariat. The failure here, if it may so be termed, was the fault of Australia, not of the system.

But it appears to be the case that consultation did fail at Cairo. None of the Dominions received adequate information regarding what was being done. Because this conference had to do with the war in the Far East, Canada was not vitally interested. Otherwise the chances are that the system would have functioned. In any event, it functioned efficiently at Moscow. It is an open secret at London that one or more of the Dominions

directly influenced the Moscow declaration.

Australia is determined—indisputably and absolutely—that the situation of 1942 shall never recur. Measures to prevent such a recurrence will be henceforth the very base of Australia's foreign policy. As a first step, Australia desires to amplify her voice at London. To do this, of course, no change in existing machinery is necessary. But Australia will never agree that the existing system of consultation is adequate because it failed, in her case, in the crisis. Australia was sure of what should have been done in 1942 but she could not persuade Mr. Churchill. Later on her view was adopted, but later on is not good enough when Japanese armies directly menace your countryside, your towns and cities. Australia believes that somehow or other means must be found whereby her advice in such circumstances will be decisive.

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HENCE the vague scheme of regionalism advocated by Mr. Curtin at his press conference. He said, in effect, that each self-governing nation of the Commonwealth should speak for the whole in its particular region. Australia knew little about Europe—let the United Kingdom do the talking about Europe. But Australia knew more than the United Kingdom about the South Pacific. So let Australia do the talking in that region—and so on.

What Mr. Curtin was advocating in reality was a single voice policy on a regional basis: four or five single voices. And what Mr. Curtin had not considered was that his policy must break down when this policy encountered an issue

which was world wide, not regional, and on which sharp disagreements existed—in a word precisely the kind of issue that did arise in March, 1941, when Australia's views collided head on with those of the United Kingdom and when Australia, in fact, did not even carry the judgment of New Zealand.

It was all rather confused and overcharged with emotion. Mr. Curtin, on several occasions, indicated that his own mind was far from clear. Australia, he agreed, was an autonomous nation. He spoke of his proposed Council or Secretariat as an editorial board. "I am expressing my own point of view," he said. "I would like to have it. I believe in the editorial board, you know, as being better than the editor by himself."

Question: "In case some of

the board do not agree, do you still think . . . ?"

Mr. Curtin: "I still think the editor would make the decision."

Question: "Who is the editor in this case?"

Mr. Curtin was rescued by Mr. Bracken, the Minister of Information, who interpolated: "You are going into too deep details." Yet it was obvious by earlier passages that Mr. Curtin did not believe in the editor having the power of decision. In the context, the editor could only have meant Mr. Churchill.

In the upshot, Mr. Curtin's proposal served to reveal the immaturity of Australia's thinking on these problems and, on the constructive side, to enable her attitude to be better understood. There was no support for him at the conference.

THE NEW ZEALAND CASE

NEW Zealand played a part at the Prime Ministers' conference out of all relation to her size and relative importance. Coming from the same region—the South Pacific—and having recently entered into a regional pact with Australia, it was generally supposed that New Zealand would line up in support of the secretariat or council proposal. On the contrary, it is not too much to say that New Zealand quietly but effectively blocked Australia at every turn.

The New Zealanders in contrast to the Australians were unaggressive, cool and steady. They dis-

played no tension, carried no chips on their shoulders. No doubt this difference in attitude was partly due to the fact that New Zealand was some 1,200 miles away from the nearest point of Japanese penetration. Australia faced the cruelest of foes across the narrow strip of sea which separates her from New Guinea. New Zealand was in the second line although she played her part in repelling the foe just as resolutely as her sister Dominion. And, incidentally, New Zealand claims to have suffered greater casualties proportionately than any other of the United Nations.

THERE was, throughout the conference, a degree of friction between these two Dominions. New Zealanders regard the Australians as adolescent, bumptious and difficult. At the same time New Zealanders temper their criticism with the thought that thirty years hence they, themselves, may go through an equally trying period. Right now, New Zealand with 1,300,000 people and, apart from agriculture, with limited resources, is too small to count for much. New Zealanders are sufficiently realistic to know that they have no weight to throw around. Therefore they do not raise their voices unduly. On the other hand, Australia, with 7,000,000 people, substantial resources and considerable industrial development, possesses power. In the world sense, Australia no doubt is a small power, but it is undoubtedly a power. Australians are keenly aware of it. The shock of 1942 impels them to make the most of their strength—hence their extreme aggressiveness.

The basic defence problems of Australia and New Zealand are identical. Their line against attack runs from Singapore through the Philippines to Hawaii, Singapore stood in their minds as a rock of ages. Yet in 1942 this line went down. The defences might as well have been made of tissue paper.

Having conceded this, the New Zealanders say: "So what?"

The Australians, however, respond differently. They think that they possess within themselves and with the co-operation of New Zealand sufficient strength to maintain this defence line. They

believe that if they had known how vincible Singapore was, they could have held it instead of dispersing their force in other and distant war theatres.

The New Zealanders disagree. They believe that New Zealand and Australia combined cannot ensure their defence. Nor can the British Commonwealth do so. The record of the war they regard as unanswerable on this point. The British Commonwealth plus the United States was just able to save Australia and did so by a margin of safety which Australians can scarcely bear to think about.

Thus, when New Zealanders say—So what?—they find the only realistic answer in a world organization pledged to prevent war. Here and here alone can the defence problem of these Dominions find solution.

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THE Australia - New Zealand pact of January is regarded by New Zealanders largely as a neighborly concession to Australia. But New Zealanders, in sharp contrast with the Australians, point out that this pact is only a gesture. In a positive sense it means nothing more than an agreement to consult in advance of decisions. There is no pledge to reach common agreement. New Zealanders explain that they entered into the agreement largely because they hoped it would make Australia feel better. Actually, the New Zealanders declare, there has been no consultation since the agreement was signed. New Zealand has never heard a word from Australia. For example, New Zealand was not consulted by Australia about the policy that Australia proposed to advocate at

the conference. The agreement, in New Zealand's view, means little. Certainly it does not bind either party. New Zealand is just as free as ever she was to go her own way.

If the agreement had imposed any limitation on New Zealand's freedom in foreign policy, it would not have been signed. The one point on which New Zealanders are emphatic is that they will never enter into any binding regional arrangement with Australia.

The reason they give is this: New Zealand's feeling about Australia is akin to Canada's feeling about the United States. New Zealand is a very small country in comparison with Australia. New Zealand has no intention of becoming the tail on the Australian dog—or as New Zealanders put it: "a second Tasmania"—and that, they say, is precisely what a binding regional pact would mean.

In refusing to do this, New Zealanders do not argue from the standpoint of national pride. Not at all. They contend that a regional

pact would be valueless. The two Dominions combined are not strong enough to guarantee their common defence. Therefore, such a pact would be ineffective and self-deluding. If two great powers, under the conditions obtaining in 1941-42 could not hold the Singapore-Hawaii line, what could the combined Dominions do? No, the only hope of security lies in a much bigger, greater aggregation of power. Collective security, a world organization of nations pledged to resist aggression, is the only solution to the problem of the defence of the South Pacific.

New Zealand is intensely British and glories in her place in the Commonwealth. She is aware, too, that as a member of the Commonwealth she has her own place and speaks with her own voice. This explains why Australia got no support from New Zealand for the secretariat idea at the conference. New Zealand interpreted the Curtin proposal as designed chiefly to increase Australia's influence at the expense of others, notably New Zealand.

NO "COMMON VOICE"

IT is difficult to analyze public opinion in the United Kingdom on future Commonwealth relations. The reason is that there is no common point of view. Opinion in the United Kingdom is not only divided into various schools of thought but lacks clarity because Commonwealth relations are not a matter of public controversy.

Broadly speaking, there was no organized movement at the higher levels of government to influence

the decisions of the prime ministers' conference. And right here may be noted a significant change in comparison with 1921 when the centralist movement was greatly in evidence. If you compare the first prime ministers' conference which sat at London from June 10 to Aug. 5, 1921, with the conference just concluded, the change will become clear.

In 1921 it was believed that the centralization or unification of the

Commonwealth had been achieved and that thereafter it would operate under an Imperial cabinet and speak with a single voice. The voice, of course, would be that of the government of the United Kingdom. It is unnecessary to burden the record with evidence in support of this statement, but a few references may be helpful.

The British White Paper on the 1921 conference said that it had disclosed "a deep conviction that the whole weight of the Empire should be concentrated behind a united understanding and common action in foreign affairs." Prime Minister Hughes of Australia referred to the 1921 conference as being "an Imperial cabinet" whose decisions bound the Commonwealth. Prime Minister Massey of New Zealand agreed with him. Prime Minister Lloyd George put it this way: "The instrument of the foreign policy of the Empire is the British Foreign Office. This has been accepted by all the Dominions as inevitable." Lord Curzon, the foreign secretary, said: "In former days the policy of Great Britain was the foreign policy of Great Britain alone. Now it is the foreign policy of the British Empire." The Times and other leading newspapers expressed similar views.

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IN 1944 there was no ramp. Some newspapers like the Beaverbrook Express and the Harmsworth Daily Mail grossly misrepresented the proceedings of the conference in an attempt to make their readers believe that a centralization policy was being approved. But these reports were speedily disowned by a spokesman for the British Government. The

Times, which in the past has ardently championed centralization, was moderate in the days preceding the conference and by the time it ended was so far gone the other way as to ask who had even suggested the "single voice" policy.

There was, however, an element in the United Kingdom which favored the Halifax idea of a world ruled by Titan powers, in which the British Commonwealth somehow should function as one of the Titans. This element was composed largely of that portion of the Conservative party which has never believed in collective security and which belittled the League of Nations from the outset. It is in direct succession to Baldwin and Chamberlain and the appeasers of 1935-1939. For more personal references the reader may consult, among many reference books, Lord Robert Cecil's autobiography.

Then there were the old line Imperialists — the Bennetts, the Amerys, Griggs, and so on. Some like Lord Beaverbrook, belonged to both schools—that is, they were appeasers as well as Imperialists. But in the main they are separate.

There were, as well, elements in the Labor party which inclined to a unified Commonwealth. Emmanuel Shinwell is the leader of this small and negligible group.

And finally there were the federationists whose leader is that sincere and able historian Lionel Curtis. There were indications that Chatham House—the headquarters in the United Kingdom of the Institute of International Affairs—was inclined to support the Curtis policy.

It would be true, as a generality, to say that British opinion as a whole would have welcomed a decision by the Dominions to throw their weight behind the United Kingdom in some centralist fashion. There is apparent nearly everywhere in the United Kingdom a haunting fear of emerging from the war relatively weak in comparison with the United States and Russia, and therefore incapable of shouldering the responsibilities of a great power. This fear leads to an unrealistic but, emotionally, a strong desire to add to the United Kingdom the power of the Dominions. But while this feeling is general, few believe that it is practical or, for that matter, that a unified Commonwealth would stay put, even if achieved. The more intelligent people are aware how dangerous it would be to the future of the world organization and to the Commonwealth itself to repeat the ill-starred experiments of 1921 which ended with Chanak.

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THE general fear of the future was not a serious factor in the attitude of the United Kingdom at the conference. And over against the small groups which desired centralization were arranged very powerful forces indeed. The foreign office definitely was opposed to centralization unless the Dominions were prepared voluntarily to surrender their sovereignty in foreign policy. The foreign office insisted that the United Kingdom government must always be free to act.

The Dominions office was equally resolute in opposing centralization and for substantially the same reasons as the foreign office. Both

these departments, which occupied key positions so far as the conference was concerned, favored consultation and collaboration and were of the view that present methods could be further improved and developed.

Other influential groups were opposed to centralization. The internationalist wing of the Conservative party—Cecil, Eden, Law, Cranborne, and many others—exerted a great influence. For one thing they held the portfolios of foreign affairs and the Dominions office. The Liberal party, for what it is worth, was solidly against Commonwealth unification. So, too, with minor exceptions, was the Labor party.

The attitude of all groups toward international organization, of course, does not necessarily provide the decisive test on Commonwealth relations. It can be and was argued that a unified Commonwealth speaking with a single voice, could play a much more effective role in international affairs and world organization than could five autonomous members of the Commonwealth. This, however, was an argument which carried little weight. If the Commonwealth decided to gang up and present a solid front to the world, it was generally agreed that the world would understand the meaning of such a reversal of past policy. It would be the signal for other groupings. The Titan world would have been born and the conception of a world organization of freedom-loving nations, large and small, would speedily fade out.

And anyhow the single voice, common policy proposition simply

would not work. Not one of the Dominions was prepared to sacrifice an iota of its sovereign right to speak for itself. If by consultation agreement could be reached so that all five policies were virtually the same, so much the better. If not, no harm would be done. The most forthright exponent of this point of view was not Mr. King, but Mr. Fraser.

If the Dominions had insisted upon making the foreign office

their mouthpiece, there would certainly have been no squawking in the United Kingdom. But most people in the United Kingdom had taken no stock in the Halifax speech nor in the tendencious reports of the imperialistic press. The British Government, quite evidently, had been proceeding for months on the assumption that the Dominions were going to run their own shows in the world and would continue to do their own thinking.

SOUTH AFRICA AND EIRE

THERE remain in this survey of the prime ministers' conference two Dominions whose positions with respect to Commonwealth relations are of importance. The sixth Dominion—the Irish Free State—was not a factor.

But while the Irish Free State, for obvious reasons, could not be represented or participate in discussions on the war situation, the effect of any decision reached upon Ireland was never absent from the minds of the prime ministers. If a policy of centralization had been approved, the return of the Free State to the councils of the Commonwealth after the war is over would have been made extremely difficult if not impossible.

On the other hand, the decision against centralization will facilitate the bridging of the present breach—a consummation devoutly wished by most if not all of the prime ministers. For, in a real sense, the decision of Ireland to remain neutral in this war will have compensations. Ireland has proved the point that the Do-

minions are autonomous and such proof will not be lost on the nationalists of South Africa and Canada, or on those in other countries who argue that the sovereignty of the British nations is merely a fiction designed to obtain five or six votes in international organizations instead of one. To make the argument watertight, however, it will be necessary for the Irish Free State to resume her place in the Commonwealth when the war is over.

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THE Canadian position is too well known to require amplification. Prior to the conference, Canada was regarded in the United Kingdom as the leading opponent of centralization. In the two-day debate on Commonwealth relations in the British House of Commons (April 20-21) the members kept on saying that "even Canada" would agree to this or the other.

The event proved, however, that Mr. King did not have to exert

himself to defeat the centralists. There was nothing to fight. He found agreement everywhere. Mr. Curtin, who developed his plan publicly on May 4, was promptly and publicly spiked by Mr. Fraser on May 5. And in any event, the Curtin plan was not acceptable to any other member of the Commonwealth.

The conference came to a complete acceptance of Mr. King's position naturally, inevitably and harmoniously. It was the only policy which offered common ground to all; upon which all could agree. Mr. King, so to speak, became the unifying influence. He won without a struggle, and he emerged from the conference with greatly enhanced prestige.

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AS for South Africa, the impact of Prime Minister Smuts on the conference was negligible. This was due, no doubt, to the difficult and complicated character of that Dominion. Considering the problems which confront South Africa—the native problem, the Dutch and the English, etc., it is not surprising that Field Marshal Smuts remained out of the limelight.

On the question of Commonwealth consolidation, Field Marshal Smuts was naturally in outright opposition. Although reputed personally to be a centralist—a position which his philosophy of Holism would naturally lead him to adopt—as the prime minister of that Dominion, he could do nothing

other than support Mr. King. Indeed, he came to the conference pledged more definitely against centralization than even Mr. King.

And, conversely, South Africa warmly supported a world organization. Field Marshal Smuts, indeed, defined the kind of an organization favored by the conference in a speech at Birmingham on May 19, three days after the conference closed. It will, he said, "almost inevitably be an improved and reformed version of the old League of Nations. That brave and brilliant improvisation failed in part largely because it was not clothed with sufficient authority and power to maintain peace. Next time responsibility should be placed on those who have the power, and the Great Powers who won the war should be made responsible in the first instance for keeping the peace—at least for the transition period—until a more permanent scheme for effective police supervision could be worked out."

The phrasing of this statement, along with the words used by Mr. Churchill, quoted earlier in this series, leaves some doubt as to the nature of the world organization to be established—particularly in regard to the keeping of the peace of the world.

But so far as Commonwealth relations are concerned, the position is crystal clear. No change was made in the relations between the autonomous British nations.

