

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

In this great concern of Imperial Defence must there not be some kind of partnership between all parts of our great Empire? I hope it will not be regarded in any way as rudeness for me to say that England, witnessing as she has, and does, the magnificent growth in strength, wealth, and numbers of these oversea Dominions, will not forget that she does not, as in the earliest days of their existence, possess them—they are no longer Crown Colonies. They create with her an Empire, and, allowing for power and numbers, they belong to that Empire just as she does. It is a family group of free nations, England is the first among the free nations, and, consequently, changes during the last three-quarters of a century, in my opinion, demand that the old relation of “mother to infants” should cease. The day for partnership in true Imperial affairs has arrived, and the question which now emerges is, upon what basis is that partnership to rest? It certainly cannot rest upon the present relationship. No partnership deserves the name which does not give to the partners at least some voice in the most vital of the partnership concerns; and what I am endeavouring to bring out is: how is that voice to be heard and how is it to be made effective?

I desire to avoid any minor controversial questions at this time; but I am entitled to express, as I do now, my profound conviction that if there had existed some true Imperial Council of State in which defence could be dealt with—I attach no importance to the name, whether it is an Imperial Council of State or an Imperial Parliament of Defence or an Imperial Council—the separate naval policies of the two great Dominions to which I have already referred would be to-day, if not non-existent, at least more completely harmonised and made integral with the Imperial Navy. In other words, had such a Council existed, I am satisfied that for the expenditure these two great countries have committed themselves to more efficient protection would have been given by means of an Imperial scheme than by those which have been devised.

I trust that the members of the Conference will realise—and I want to avoid dogmatism in this matter—that I am expressing my personal opinion, as I have a right to do, and I feel quite sure that the representatives of none of the other Dominions, even those to which I am referring, will take exception to what I believe to be my duty in a matter of this kind, for naturally it is done in a strictly Imperial sense, and without in any way whatever reflecting upon the loyalty of those great countries.

I cannot avoid keeping before me the whole time, in connection with this important question of defence, the difficulties of regulating and controlling it. I recognise to the fullest possible extent the all-important question of the protection of the commodities and of the ships that cross the seas between the respective countries; and the more I have thought over this important matter from time to time and since I had the honour of first coming to this Conference, the more I realise the tremendous responsibility devolving upon all portions of the oversea Dominions in connection with the protection of British ships, British goods, and British people travelling over the seas great distances between the respective portions of the Dominions. To a very material extent, in my opinion, the local protection, however good it may be, for the separate portions of the Dominions concerned is not sufficient, is not adequate, and does not meet the condition of protecting the conveyance of oversea products to anything like the extent that it ought to do.

For these reasons I recognise how difficult it is in a matter of this kind to expect any of the representatives of the oversea Dominions to re-discuss a line of policy which has already been assented to by them. My own view of the matter is that we should have an impartial and effective organization created which would allow all portions of our British Empire to review what is necessary for the self-preservation of themselves and the protection of all portions of it on sea as well as on land; and, in my opinion, that can only be brought about by some organization created with the good will, not of the representatives at this Conference alone, but finally of the people in the respective countries concerned. I emphasize this because nothing that is suggested by me, or nothing that is carried by this Conference, can be put into actual effect (so far as New Zealand is