

The peoples of the Dominions—and this is very noticeable in Australia—are taking a widespread interest in all questions of foreign policy, because of the growing realization that no nation can live unto itself. At successive Imperial Conferences since 1902 the development of the Dominions towards nationhood has been recognized, and the principles of free co-operation on a basis of equality have been consistently applied.

This has led to a rapid evolution in the relationship between the Mother country and the self-governing Dominions, and yet, despite the forebodings of some who saw in this development a threat to Imperial unity, never has the Empire been more united.

This unity has its source in the unique position which the Crown holds in the British Commonwealth, and has been greatly strengthened by the affection and esteem which the King and the members of the Royal family have won by their devotion to duty, self-sacrifice, and spirit of high endeavour in the best interests of all their people.

To-day we stand as a group of peace-loving nations united by our allegiance to the Throne, and bound together by our faith in democracy and our common love of liberty and justice. World peace is the ideal which all the peoples of the British Empire have as their objective.

FOREIGN POLICY.

We are all members of the League of Nations, and of recent years the declared policy of the British nations has been based on the League's concept of permanent peace ensured by the principles of conciliation, arbitration, and collective action.

These principles constituted a focal point for a common Empire policy. Unhappily the experience of the last few years has shown the impracticability, under present conditions, of achieving to the full the great ideals which are embodied in the Covenant. The Australian Government, therefore, is of the opinion that an examination of the bases of the British Commonwealth foreign policy and of the position of the League should be one of the major considerations of this Conference, with a view to the formulation of a consistent and unified Empire policy.

In this examination we of the Dominions must recognize that the new status which we have achieved and which we regard with such pride carries with it not only great privileges, but also great responsibilities. These responsibilities involve the obligation of assuming the full burden of nationhood. No longer can we shelter behind our partnership in the British Empire. We must face to the fullest extent of our capacity the obligation to provide for our own national defence. We must be prepared to play our part in ensuring the peace of the world. We must be prepared to offer our counsel and to reinforce that counsel with our assistance should the circumstances ever arise wherein those great principles for which British people have ever stood are imperilled. Further, we must ever remember that never before have our own people and the people of the world looked more anxiously for British leadership.

All democratic peoples, and all who desire the maintenance of international law and order, are hoping for positive results from this Conference. They look for a clear lead along the path of stable and enduring peace, and the Australian Government feels that a statement should issue from this Conference which will demonstrate to the rest of the world that the countries composing the British Commonwealth of Nations are prepared to act together in support of the maintenance of international law and order.

As a result of the work of this Conference we can make a great contribution to the stabilization and pacification of the world. It is my sincere hope that we shall rise to the height of our opportunity.

NON-AGGRESSION IN THE PACIFIC.

While I do not desire to anticipate the discussion which will take place when we have the question of foreign policy before us, there is one area of the world, the Pacific, where Australia's interests are so vitally concerned that I desire to make a brief reference to it.

The Australian Government has noted the tendency of States to endeavour to enter into agreements in the form of regional pacts in respect of regions where their interests are directly concerned. Australia would greatly welcome a regional understanding and pact of non-aggression by the countries of the Pacific, conceived in the spirit of the principles of the League. Towards the achievement of such a pact we are prepared to collaborate with all other peoples of the Pacific in a spirit of understanding and sympathy.

DEFENCE.

I now desire to say a word on defence. Australia views her security and that of the British Commonwealth as lying within three successive ramparts—the Covenant of the League, the strength of the British Commonwealth, and her own Defence Forces.

We recall the words of the United Kingdom Government that it can no longer close its eyes to the fact that adequate defences are still required for security and to enable the British Empire to play its full part in maintaining the peace of the world. We are also aware of the extensive measures being taken by the United Kingdom Government to strengthen its defences, in conjunction with its declared intention to pursue the national policy of peace by every practicable means.

Australia looks for the frankest discussion during the Conference of the international position and its relation to the United Kingdom defence programme in order to enable the Australian Government to review its defence policy in the light of the facts which emerge, and to put before the people and Parliament for endorsement the policy that the Ministry may decide upon.