

TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTION: POLITICS IN AUSTRALIA: POLLING IN NEW ZEALAND: THE DOMINIONS AND IMPERIAL POLICY.

THERE have been two general elections both interesting and instructive, in the King's Dominions Overseas.

In South Africa where polling took place on July 29, the Coalition Ministry, which Field-Marshal Smuts heads, achieved a spectacular victory, far more decisive than its most optimistic supporters had hoped for. Out of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives, Smuts's own party, the United, captured about eighty, enough to provide it with a working majority on its own account, and, when seats won by members of its two allies, the Labor and Dominion parties, are added, the Smuts Ministry can count upon the support of 107 members in the lower House and also upon an effective majority in the Senate. The Nationalist party, led by the veteran Dr. Malan, managed by carrying 43 seats to escape any serious impairment of its former strength, but the minor dissentient factions, who followed the banners of Mr. Havenga and Mr. Pirow, were left without any representation in Parliament and will probably now disappear to the satisfaction of the Nationalists.

The election was fought mainly on the record of the Smuts Ministry as the sponsor of South Africa's participation in the war, and the administrator of a war effort which had grown to large proportions. In presenting its case for a renewal of confidence, the Government was materially helped by two factors: the popular enthusiasm which had been stirred up by the fine record of the fighting forces of South Africa in Abyssinia and North Africa; also the indignation and sympathy evoked among the Dutch Afrianders over the brutal oppressions practised by the Nazis upon their racial kinsfolk in Holland. The harsh German treatment of the European Dutch undoubtedly impelled thousands of South African Dutch, who had never before supported Smuts, to cast their ballots for his Government in this election. Indeed, as the campaign progressed, the Opposition forces found that denunciation of South African participation in the war was not a good electioneering counter, and diverted their energies to frightening the voters about the dangers which threatened South Africa through her present alliance with a baneful Communist nation like Russia. There was also evidence

that the Nationalists had no serious hope of victory, or even desire, for the responsibilities of power, and were for the moment more concerned with the elimination of the other opposition groups, whose existence they resented. The accomplishment of this objective must give them some consolation.

Field Marshal Smuts was almost certainly fighting his last political campaign as he is now in his 74th year and its triumphant outcome was an immense tribute to the vast prestige which he has built up inside and outside of South Africa by reason of his unique intellectual powers, his fine political abilities, his high character and his long record of disinterested public service. After he joined with his friend General Botha in signing the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902 and accepting thereby the supremacy of the British flag in South Africa, he soon became deeply impressed by the generosity shown by the British people in their treatment of a conquered enemy, and reached the conclusion that South Africa could attain her finest destiny and find the easiest paths of security and prosperity as a partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations. After playing a major role in building the Union of South Africa and securing recognition for its equal status in the partnership of the Commonwealth, he has never wavered in his advocacy of the latter's value for his country. For his unswerving attitude, he has at times incurred great unpopularity with the majority of his Dutch compatriots, and there were periods in his career when very few of them would give him their allegiance and as a result he encountered serious political reverses. But he has never faltered with his fundamental convictions, and now he has reaped a fitting reward for high political courage and consistency of aim in the conversion of many of his former opponents or doubting Laodiceans to his views.

Now that he is firmly re-seated in the saddle and is emancipated from worries about his domestic political situation, he will be free to concentrate his energies upon the complicated problems of the post-war reconstruction of this battered world. There is no other politically active survivor of the band of allied statesmen who framed the Treaty of Versailles and evolved the structure of the League of Nations in 1919, and at the council table, where another peace settlement will have to be worked out, his fund of enlightened sagacity and his ripe experience of statecraft should be invaluable assets, even if they were devoted to no other purpose than to the exposition of what errors in the earlier peace must not be repeated. On the British side Smuts, after Lord

Cecil, was at Versailles the most convinced and ardent advocate of the League of Nations, and some of his recent public utterances indicate that he intends to work strenuously for the creation of a new world organization on the same lines as the League but equipped with real power and authority to enforce its decisions and suppress aggressor nations.

He may also be able to make a valuable contribution to the solution of the difficult problem of the fortunes of the backward races of the African continent, which must be tackled in a generous and comprehensive fashion in the peace settlement. South Africa with her large colored population will be vitally interested in the decisions which will be reached, and in their formulation Smuts will undoubtedly exercise a powerful influence. Hitherto fears of alienating the whole Dutch population of South Africa, whose attitude to the native problem has in the main been reactionary, has operated to repress his innate liberalism in this particular field of policy and the record of the Government, in which he has been a leading spirit, in regard to the colored peoples of South Africa has been very disappointing to many of his admirers. But now that South African pride in his position as one of the foremost leaders of the free democracies has given him unchallengable power and freed him from the necessity of catering for votes, he may feel able to emerge as the champion of enlightened policies towards the backward races of Africa, which will remove gradually many of their present disabilities and accelerate their progress along the road to self-government and better standards of life.

AUSTRALIA held her general election on August 21st, when the Labor Ministry of Mr. John Curtin sought a fresh mandate. Since it assumed office in October, 1942, it had led a very precarious existence, only keeping afloat by the grace of the votes of two Independent members, and it was also at the mercy of a group of its own extremist supporters. It based its chief claim for a new lease of power on the record of its administration of the nation's war effort, and it was fortunate that during the campaign a series of successes for the Allied Forces operating in the south-western Pacific occurred to support its case that its policies had effectively safeguarded Australia from invasion by the Japanese and were paving the way for a resolute offensive against them.

The personal popularity which Mr. Curtin through his tireless industry, his modest demeanor and his conciliatory attitude

towards his opponents had built up for himself since he assumed the Premiership was a very valuable asset to the Government, but even more valuable was the widespread confidence reposed in the abilities of Dr. H. V. Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs. This distinguished lawyer, who resigned a High Court judgeship in 1939 to enter politics on the Labor side, is proving himself one of the ablest and most attractive figures who have emerged upon the Australian political scene since the late Alfred Deakin vanished from it, and his presence in the Cabinet has won for it the support of middleclass elements, who had never before evinced any sympathy with the Labor party. The Government was also fortunate in having to face an opposition which was bitterly divided by differences of opinion and personal vendettas. The substantial divergences of opinion between the United Australia party and the agrarian elements who compose the other wing of the opposition, the Country Party, are not always easy to compose, but much more serious in its consequences was the bitter personal feud between the two former Premiers, Mr. A. W. Fadden, who is titular leader of the Opposition, and Mr. R. G. Menzies. It dates from the day when Mr. Menzies, who has all the qualities needed for successful leadership in politics except the gift of co-operating easily with people of brains inferior to his own, was ousted from the office of Prime Minister by a sort of palace revolution which Mr. Fadden headed. Mr. Menzies has never made any secret of his dislike for his supplanter, and right in the middle of the campaign he denounced openly as impracticable an important feature of a new taxation policy propounded by Mr. Fadden and intimated that he must oppose it. There followed a bitter exchange of mutual recriminations between the two oppositionist leaders, and Mr. Curtin and his lieutenants were supplied with deadly ammunition by being able to assert that there was no hope of an opposition, whose leaders were quarrelling over a basic policy, providing Australia with a stable and harmonious Government.

So it was all in vain that Mr. Menzies who is a very effective campaigner, Mr. Fadden and the veteran W. M. Hughes indicted the Government for many sins of omission and commission in connection with its war policy, and accused it of using the war as a screen for committing the country to further Socialist experiments of a dangerous kind and fastening upon it an overgrown and extravagant bureaucracy. The independent voters, who are very numerous in Australia, simply decided that the Opposition was not fit to be entrusted with power until its

internal quarrels had been settled, and that since the Curtin Ministry had a reasonably good record in office, it could be safely entrusted with a fresh mandate. There was also a feeling abroad in many quarters, where little sympathy is felt for the Socialist programme of the Labor party, that it might be wise to keep in office until the war ended the party which had at first been least enthusiastic about wholehearted Australian participation in the war. Moreover on the eve of the polling Mr. Curtin made a very shrewd bid for the votes of the ardent Imperialists by pronouncing himself explicitly in favor of the establishment of some organization like an Imperial Council for the purpose of coordinating the policies of the British nations about foreign affairs and other matters, and this striking departure from the old moorings of the Australian Labor party, which has hitherto been strongly anti-Imperialist, may have important consequences.

The outcome of the contest was that the Australian voters, by electing Laborites in 51 out of the 75 seats in the House of Representatives and also giving them enough gains of Senatorial seats for a small working majority, presented the Labor party with its most decisive victory in its history. The Curtin Ministry has received clear authority to persevere with its war policies, but whether it has a mandate for taking Australia further along the path to complete collectivism than has so far been deemed feasible will be a subject of controversy.

ON SEPTEMBER 25 the voters of New Zealand marched in step with their kindred in South Africa and Australia by conferring at a general election a fresh mandate upon the ruling Labor Ministry, whose head is a canny Scot, Mr. Peter Fraser. It is true that his Government did not share the good fortune of the Smuts and Curtin Ministries in securing a substantial increase of its previous majority. Through a net loss of 6 seats its parliamentary strength was reduced from 49 to 43, and in the new House of Representatives it will have only a slender majority of 6 over the 36 members of the National Party, which made 13 gains, and the solitary survivor of the band of Independents who sat in the last House. But the Labor party would probably have held its own, if a newly organized party, styled the Democratic-Soldier-Labor Party, had not intervened in the contest. It did not carry a single seat, but it split the Leftist vote in a number of constituencies and thereby handed them over to National candidates.

The personal popularity of Mr. Fraser made a considerable contribution to his victory in the first election which he fought as Premier, but his Government had won popular confidence by its vigorous and reasonably efficient management of the national war effort and, since it had not attempted to maintain a partisan control of this effort but had invited leaders of the opposition to share in it, many voters of independent views could see no valid reason for forcing a change of government. But the increase in the aggregate poll of the National Party probably reflects a growing uneasiness among the wealthier classes about the Labor Ministry's steady appropriation of fresh fields for the application of state socialism, and about the capacity of the financial resources of New Zealand to bear after the war the strain of the continued heavy taxation which the government's ambitiously enlarged scheme of social security and other radical policies will inevitably entail. The results of these two general elections in the Antipodes mean that two of the British governments which will be represented at the peace conference will be Socialist in their outlook and ideals, and this fact may have very important consequences. One of the dangers which menace the evolution of a satisfactory peace settlement is the unfortunate coolness which prevails in the relations between Russia and the two leading Anglo-Saxon democracies. The Russians are undoubtedly—and not without justification—suspicious that there exist in Britain and the United States very powerful groups which dislike intensely Russia's economic and other policies and, fearing the spread of her influence, are ardently anxious to construct through an alliance a system of Anglo-American imperialism which would be strong enough to dominate a large part of the world and prevent it from succumbing to the baneful infection of Russian ideas.

IF THE PERIOD of peacemaking found installed in power at Washington a Republican administration under the guidance of a less enlightened politician than Mr. Wendell Willkie, it would certainly bend all its energies to making the world as safe as possible for capitalism, and the pronouncements of Republican leaders like Governor Dewey in favor of an Anglo-American alliance are straws which show the direction of the wind now blowing in these circles. With equal certainty there would develop in Britain a clash between the elements who wanted a close alliance (with an anti-Russian bias) of the Anglo-Saxon

Powers for the preservation of the capitalist system and a party which favored a close concordat with Russia in order to promote a reorganization of society on Socialist lines. The core of this pro-Russian front would undoubtedly be the British Labor Party, which has become very suspicious of the designs of American imperialism, and it ought to be able to rely upon the cooperation of the Labor governments of Australia and New Zealand. So, if the British Labor Party were returned to power in a post-war general election, there might well be evolved a new political symbiosis through the decision of majorities in the British nations to cooperate in the building of a Socialist Commonwealth as a rival contrasting system to the structure of capitalism which the ruling forces in the United States would be striving to maintain. Here are the makings of a situation which offers arresting possibilities, and might profoundly affect the fortunes and policies of our own C.C.F. party. Hitherto the influence of isolationists, high in its councils, like Professor Frank Scott has tended to make the C.C.F. lukewarm and even hostile to projects for the coordinated cooperation of the partner nations of the Commonwealth. But, viewing the trends of the times, the leaders of the C.C.F. might easily decide that a policy of close cooperation for the British nations, fortified by a warm rapprochement with Russia, might reap rich political dividends for the promotion of the Socialist cause in Canada, and stranger things have happened than the emergence of the C.C.F. party as the vigorous champions of such a policy.

Indeed Mr. Curtin, the Australian Premier, may well have been aiming to pave the way for a such a new political alignment, when during the closing stages of his election campaign he raised sharply the issue of the internal relation of the British Commonwealth and the inadequacy of the present arrangements for achieving an effective coordination of their war and post-war policies. During the first World War an Imperial War Cabinet, which exercised a general direction over the strategical and correlated policies of the whole Commonwealth, was in existence during its later stages. Our own Sir Robert Borden was one of its most influential members and it worked with harmony, efficiency and success. During the present war not only has no Imperial War Cabinet been constituted, but there has not even been a full dress Imperial Conference. At intervals Prime Ministers of the Dominion, including Mr. King, have visited London, and Mr. Churchill has twice visited Canada, but apart from these spasmodic foregatherings the cooperative consultations between

the various British Governments have been conducted by telephone, cable and correspondence. Since the war began, Mr. Mackenzie King has steadily set his face against the creation of any Imperial War Cabinet, and Mr. Churchill on at least one occasion gave public endorsement by implication to the attitude of the Canadian Government. Moreover Mr. King has repeatedly professed serene satisfaction with the present arrangements for consultation and has gone so far as to assert that they could not possibly be improved upon. In September 1941, when he held a press conference on his return from his only visit to London since the war broke out, he answered a question about the British attitude towards his opposition to an Imperial War Cabinet thus:

I think everyone shares my view. I am sure the belief I expressed that continuing conferences with our Cabinets are more effective than any conference with Dominion Prime Ministers or the creation of an Imperial War Cabinet is very largely supported in Britain now. It is the most effective means of carrying on matters in time of war.

But Mr. Curtin, the Australian Prime Minister, if he ever shared these views of the Mr. King, has now abandoned them. The Australian Labor party, which he leads, has been traditionally since its foundation anti-Imperialist and has been deeply permeated with an isolationist and non-cooperative spirit in regard to its relations with Britain and the other Dominions. Mr. Curtin may have been angling for the allurements of Imperialist votes when he made on the eve of the polling an important pronouncement about Imperialist relations, but it marked a great departure from the old moorings of his party. He proclaimed his conviction that the present arrangements for consultation between the governments of the Commonwealth were unsatisfactory, because the exchange of views by cable involved unfortunate delays, which sometimes had serious consequences. "Unless" he said "a decision is made quickly, delays will produce inertia or complete inaction and, when the decisions are ultimately reached, they will be too late to be effective." He made the further declaration that "The Mother Country can not manage an Empire on the basis of a government in London" and he pronounced himself in favor of the establishment of some coordinating organization of a permanent character, like an Imperial Council, for the Commonwealth. Mr. Curtin has now unquestioned authority to speak for Australia, and his observations

indicated that his Labor Ministry, which must have authorised his speech, is planning to demand new methods of consultation and cooperation within the British Commonwealth.

To Mr. Curtin's statement of policy there have been interesting reactions in Britain and elsewhere. When Mr. Churchill was interrogated in the British House about his views on it, he replied that such spacious issues as were involved would be appropriate subjects for an Imperial Conference or a meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Dominions, and that he hoped to secure the latter, which he characterized as "an important immediate objective" early in 1944. He also made the disclosure that he had been trying for two years to arrange such a meeting, which he understood was a more feasible enterprise than a full dress Imperial Conference, but he had encountered great difficulties, which his government was patiently endeavoring to solve. The ball was then tossed to Ottawa, where Mr. King was questioned by inquisitive journalists about his attitude. He replied that, when the question of a meeting of the Prime Ministers had been raised some months ago, he had expressed to Mr. Churchill his willingness to attend such a gathering, and that during a further discussion of the same subject at the Quebec conference he had reiterated his earlier assurance that he would do his utmost to attend the meeting. So, if Mr. King was ever one source of the difficulties which had baffled Mr. Churchill, he has ceased to be. But upon the subject of the creation of an Imperial War Cabinet or Imperial Council he preserved a discreet silence.

Meanwhile there have been forthcoming in Britain interesting statements of faith about Commonwealth relations on the part of important political personages. After Mr. Lionel Curtis, one of the leaders of the Round Table movement, had published a pamphlet which restated his arguments for some plan of consolidation for the Commonwealth, Mr. Amery, the Secretary of India, who has always been a zealous Imperialist, attacked Mr. Curtis's views in a public speech, and contended that any closely knit organization for the Commonwealth was superfluous, because the Dominions had rallied so splendidly to the common defence in 1914 and 1939. Mr. Attlee, the leader of the Labor Party, who, like Mr. Amery, had served as Secretary for the Dominions, supported the latter's position in an interview. Thereupon Mr. Curtis deployed to his own defence in a letter to the London *Times*, and cited the declaration of Mr. Curtin, who, he said, spoke for a continent that had only escaped by a hair's

breadth the fate of Hong-Kong, whereas Mr. Amery and Mr. Attlee had unfolded the views of two typical "Mr. Mother Countries" (a phrase coined by Edward Gibbon Wakefield) and were content for things to remain as they were before the war in this best of all possible Commonwealths. Then he proceeded thus:

He (Mr. Amery) avoids the real point I have made—that the final purpose and justification of the British Commonwealth is not to win world wars but to prevent their breaking out, as in fact it did for a century after the Battle of Waterloo. Since the close of that century the British Commonwealth has failed to prevent the outbreak of two attempts to destroy it which have ended in world wars, the most murderous that history has seen.

I have then put the question "Can a Government which commands resources limited to Britain and Northern Ireland now hope to ensure from attack one-quarter of the human race, scattered all over the globe?" That practical question Mr. Amery ignores, as do all those who insist that the present system or absence of system must remain in principle as it is.

Then our own eminent exile, Lord Bennett, recently admitted to an audience in London that he had been losing sleep through his anxiety about the problems which had been presented to the Dominions for consideration, and about which agreement had been so difficult to attain. So, after arguing that the amazing new developments in aerial transportation had removed one of the chief obstacles to personal consultation between the leaders of the British nations, he said:

Foreign policy is dependent upon unanimous action on the part of the Dominions and this country, and it can only be brought about by consultation.—We have wireless and cables, and we have telephones, but all the telephone communications in the world cannot take the place of men sitting down together, debating and discussing the problems with which they have to deal. The best illustration of what I mean is to be found in the meetings between Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt. Do you think that the war could have taken the bent it has done if it had not been possible for these men to sit in consultation?

Accordingly Lord Bennett pleaded almost tearfully for a conference on the establishment of cooperative aerial services for the whole Commonwealth as indispensable agencies for promoting personal consultations between its leaders.

But the London *Economist*, which has never been noted for Imperialist proclivities, is almost equally disturbed by the flaws and disabilities of the present arrangements for consultation. In a recent issue it pointed out that, although the Dominions have now enjoyed equal status with the mother country for a whole decade in law and for longer in fact, the scheme of consultative cooperation which has been followed "has been something less than a formulation of policy between equals." What has been happening continuously since 1920 has been that British governments have evolved foreign policies through their own agencies and when they were in finished shape have invited the endorsement of the Dominions. It was open to the Dominion governments to protest or refuse acquiescence, but the records show that when they were presented with *faits accomplis*, they lacked the courage to protest or suggest alternative policies. The brave stand taken by the Labor Ministry of New Zealand against the Baldwin Government's disposition to betray the system of collective security was an honorable exception to this habit, but it proved unavailing. And the result of the system which has been in vogue was that the Dominions complacently acquiesced in the incredibly foolish and cowardly policies of the worst Government that Britain has known since the days of Lord North, and became immersed in a second international bloodbath.

The *Economist* holds that this state of affairs cannot possibly continue, and that the Dominions are entitled to play as large a part as Britain in the formulation of policy from first draft to finished document and would find little opposition in Britain to this claim. So it proceeded thus:

The fullest cooperation in the formulation of policy requires that there should be an Imperial body in fairly constant session. It need not always sit in London, but London is probably a more convenient centre than most. If the United Kingdom has acted in the name of the Commonwealth without proper consultation, it is as much because of the absence of such a body as through any desire to ignore the Dominions' own views.

The final conclusion of the *Economist* was that if a Commonwealth policy is to become a positive reality, all the British nations must be ready to take commitments in common council, and that with anything less Britain will be compelled to act on her own and hope still to obtain the subsequent assent of the Dominions.

Undoubtedly the war has impressed upon the people of the Dominions most profoundly the conviction that they must make some constructive contribution and accept the obligations involved for the avoidance of a recurrence of the present catastrophe. They cannot make such a contribution as long as in practice they entrust the evolution of their foreign policy to the British government and accept in this sphere a role of subordinate colonialism. So the basic problem is to create machinery for procuring an effective voice for the Dominions in shaping the foreign policy of the British Commonwealth as a whole. Mr. Curtin did not attempt to formulate any detailed solution for this problem, but his action in proclaiming his dissatisfaction with the existing methods of imperial consultation deserves commendation from all forward looking people, who are interested in the preservation of the British Commonwealth. There may be formidable obstacles to the creation of the necessary machinery for enabling it to speak with a united voice, but they are not insuperable.

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