

SIR EARLE PAGE AT BRADFORD

The following is the text of a speech to be delivered by Sir Earle Page, Australia's Special Envoy to Great Britain, at a British Legion Rally at Bradford about 3.p.m. this afternoon:-

AUSTRALIA AND THE WAR CABINET

I was sent to London to find a workable means of solving the problem of continuous consultation between Empire Governments, which has become more than ever necessary by the setting-up of supreme commands in different areas under the direction of Allied War Councils.

A plan has now been worked out, which I think, will enable Australia, and the other Dominions if they so desire, to take their full share in the direction of the war.

The problem of the Australian Government has been to find a method of exerting influence sufficiently early in the formative stage of policy. To do this it is essential that a Dominion Government should have a full knowledge of all facts, developments and trends of policy. This knowledge must be obtained in time to express its views before decisions are made. It must have an opportunity of placing before the key men of the various Departments, such as the Services, Supply and Foreign Office, the Australian point of view while policy is still fluid. Its representative should have the opportunity of presenting to and discussing with the War Cabinet any suggestions as to new policy that Australia might from time to time desire to submit.

As the result of our experience and discussions over the past three months, a system of inter-governmental consultation has now been arranged by the British Government to the Dominions, whereby these essentials can be obtained over the whole field of warlike activity.

The main objection to past methods was that the Dominions frequently received information too late for any proper consultation before decisions were arrived at by the War Cabinet, and so were presented with the question either of approval or rejection by the Dominion or some very slight alteration as the result of long distance argument.

An adaptation of the British War Cabinet machinery to Empire needs has now been made to overcome these objections. British War Cabinet machinery consists of 3 parts - first the liaison machinery between all the departments of State - military, political, supply etc. This enables a continuous flow of information to be sent to the second part - the Defence Committee, which includes the Chiefs of Staff, on which to base its decisions. These decisions are accepted or rejected by the War Cabinet, which is the third part of the machinery.

The machinery now being made available to handle the situation aims to permit the fullest exchange of information at all levels at which contact between the Governments takes place. It includes the accrediting of a special representative to the British War Cabinet, gives him facilities and opportunities of securing knowledge from British Departmental sources for carrying out his task, and makes available to him all the information that is available to other members of the War Cabinet. At the same time it provides the means to make contacts to enable the Australian point of view to be put to all British Departments.

An essential feature of this organization is the appointment by the different Dominions of liaison officers. Their function is to contact men of their own rank in the different Service and Supply Departments while policy is in the actual making.

/This contact

This contact is specially necessary at that point in the Department at which the general view of the whole of the subject matter is being discussed, at the point where a summary is being prepared for those higher up to have a bird's-eye view of the situation. At this point, oral discussion between the Australian representative and the British departmental official will secure Australian colour in picture. Higher up the scale as the actual policy takes shape further departmental consultation may be necessary while at the highest plane War Cabinet discussion will take place.

This indispensable vertical liaison that interlocks the departmental view of the two Governments at different levels will need very little additional staff. Close communication of departmental officials from different Governments and mutual understanding of their point of view will eliminate many causes of conflict of opinion which at present develop higher up the scale. Where conflict of opinion cannot be resolved by departmental means, the political representative of every Government will have available from his own officers all the arguments pro and con the departmental point of view.

With this knowledge the Australian representative in the Defence Committee or the War Cabinet is in a position to argue his case on an equal footing with the other represented Governments.

This machinery has proved general in its possibility of application. The British Government is making it available not merely to Dominion Governments for Empire consultation but also an appropriate modification of it, to the Royal Dutch Government in so far as the Pacific War Council is concerned.

The Pacific War Council with these facilities becomes, in effect, a Defence Committee for the area it controls. It is responsible to the War Cabinets of the constituent countries of that area and is thus analagous to the British Defence Committee which is responsible to the British War Cabinet.

This set-up in the Pacific War Council divorces its structure from the British War Cabinet, which is all to the good. It gives the same weight in personnel and voice to each of the participating partners. It makes a body not directly responsible, like the British War Cabinet, to the British Parliament, though of course the representatives of each Government must still remain responsible to their own Parliament.

It may possibly provide a pattern by which future international governmental collaboration can be secured.

In so far as Australia is concerned, however, Australia not merely has a voice in Pacific strategy but, through the granting of membership of the British War Cabinet, some opportunity of expressing its views on Empire war strategy as a whole.

This permanent machinery that gives a departmental underpinning to the political representation will, if availed of by all Empire Governments, remove the reason for the slow progress that has been made in Empire consultation since the last war. That slow progress was due to the absence of that continuity of contact that is essential to a Dominion Government pulling its full weight in any Cabinet discussions and keeping its own constituents fully in touch.

Imperial Conferences and the like, occasional representation in the War Cabinet by visiting Prime Ministers or Ministers, is not of itself sufficient. The absence of some permanent and continuous departmental machinery that would enable the Dominion Envoy to possess a general knowledge of the whole subject in all its Empire phases, has always placed him at a definite disadvantage. That disadvantage is now being removed by the steps that have been taken.

AUSTRALIA HOUSE

(ISSUED THROUGH THE DOMINIONS OFFICE PRESS SECTION)