

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

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## *About the electronic version*

**Political and External Affairs**

**Author: Wood, F. L. W.**

**Creation of machine-readable version: TechBooks, Inc.**

**Creation of digital images: TechBooks, Inc.**

**Conversion to TEI.2-conformant markup: TechBooks, Inc.**

**New Zealand Electronic Text Centre, 2003**

**Wellington, New Zealand**

**Extent: ca. 1300 kilobytes**

**Illustrations have been included from the original source.**

## *About the print version*

### **Political and External Affairs**

**Author: Wood, F. L. W.**

**War History Branch, Department Of Internal Affairs, 1958  
Wellington, New Zealand**

**Source copy consulted: VUW Library**

### **Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–45**

## *Encoding*

**Prepared for the New Zealand Electronic Text Centre as part of the  
Official War History project.**

**All unambiguous end-of-line hyphens have been removed, and the  
trailing part of a word has been joined to the preceding line. Every effort  
has been made to preserve the Māori macron using unicode.**

**Some keywords in the header are a local Electronic Text Centre scheme  
to aid in establishing analytical groupings.**

## *Revisions to the electronic version*

**11 November 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added name markup for many names in the body of the text.**

**31 August 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added link markup for project in TEI header.**

**27 July 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added missing text on page iv and first page.**

**4 June 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Split title into title and series title.**

**12 February 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added cover images section and declarations.**

**February 2004**

**Sanjan Kar**

**Added figure descriptions**

**15 December 2003**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added TEI header**

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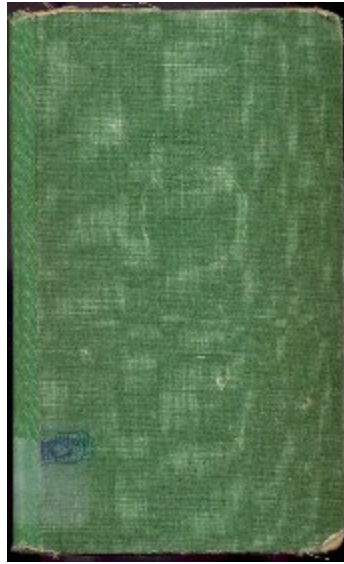
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[COVERS]



THE HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND  
AS FAR AS THE EUROPEAN DISCOVERY

THE  
NEW ZEALAND PEOPLE  
AT WAR

*Political and General Aspects*

by  
A. C. WOOD

THE HONG KONG &  
SHANGHAI PRESS, LTD.  
PRINTED IN HONG KONG

1918



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

[TITLE PAGE]

*Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–45*

The authors of the volumes in this series of histories prepared under the supervision of the **War History Branch** of the Department of Internal Affairs have been given full access to official documents. They and the Editor-in-Chief are responsible for the statements made and the views expressed by them.

**By Authority:**

**R. E. OWEN, Government Printer, Wellington, New Zealand**

**1958**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## [FRONTISPIECE]



British Empire delegates to the San Francisco Conference meet at No. 10 Downing Street.

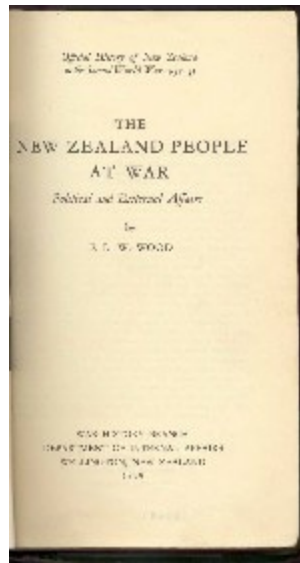
*Left to right:* Mr F. M. Forde (Australia), Field-Marshal Smuts (South Africa), Mr P. Fraser (New Zealand), and Mr Winston Churchill

**British Empire delegates to the San Francisco Conference meet at No. 10 Downing Street**

***Left to right:* Mr F. M. Forde ( [Australia](#)), Field-Marshal Smuts (South Africa), Mr P. Fraser (New Zealand), and Mr Winston Churchill**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

[TITLE PAGE]



*Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45*  
**THE NEW ZEALAND PEOPLE AT WAR**  
*Political and External Affairs*

**F. L. W. WOOD**

**WAR HISTORY BRANCH**

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW  
ZEALAND 1958** *Distributed by*

WHITCOMBE & TOMBS LTD.

**Christchurch, New Zealand**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## PREFACE

### *Preface*

**THIS** book was planned and virtually completed under the editorship of the late **Sir Howard Kippenberger**. His personal support was unflinching and his humanity, integrity, and wide-ranging knowledge were a continual source of strength. To his successor, **Brigadier Fairbrother**, my warm thanks are also due, and to past and present members of the staff of the **War History Branch**. In particular, I am indebted to the research assistants who have from time to time worked with me, all of them formerly students at **Victoria University College**: Hubert Witheford, whose collaboration in parts of the book amounted to virtual co-authorship, John O'Shea, Patricia Lissington, Ian Wards, and Judith Hornabrook. Without their skilled help it would have been physically impossible to deal with the vast mass of official documents on which this volume is largely based. These documents are mainly in the custody of the Department of External Affairs. The Secretary of that Department, Mr A. D. McIntosh, and his staff have facilitated research with courtesy and efficiency. The conditions necessarily involved in giving access to such documents have been liberally administered. I am satisfied that nothing has been withheld, here or elsewhere; and there has at no time been any suggestion of censorship or pressure to add or omit, or to modify judgments.

I record with pleasure that the Council of **Victoria University College** has always, in my experience, done all that was permitted by its inadequate resources to encourage research; we are all indebted in this as in much else to the vision shown by Sir Thomas Hunter and his successor as Principal, James Williams. My major debt, however, lies within my own Department. From my academic colleagues I have had for many years sustaining friendship, and the stimulus of lively and critical scholarship; and from the secretarial staff, especially from Rona

**Arbuckle, my secretary during three critical years, skill and patience in the handling of a tormented manuscript.**

**F. L. W. Wood**

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## PRELUDE: A FIELD DEFINED

### *Prelude: A Field Defined*

**THIS volume is concerned with the politics of New Zealand's participation in the Second World War: a broad definition which is intelligible according to the interpretation placed on its terms. There is much discussion of soldiers, but this is not military history; for the core of the inquiry is the 'why' rather than the 'how' of New Zealand's fighting. Political thinking—and feeling—within the Dominion are clearly relevant, and sometimes domestic politics strongly influenced the shape of New Zealand's war effort. Only to this extent, however, are they here analysed. Otherwise, the word politics is broadly conceived. It includes, for example, the impact of economic and social trends on public policy. These aspects of New Zealand life, however, are touched on relatively lightly because, in the upshot, political history turns out to be concerned with the activities of political leaders to a greater extent than might have been expected in a country so dedicated to a democratic theory. Their actions are on record: and moreover they register, often with subtlety and accuracy, the thinking and the emotions of those anonymous men and women who were the New Zealand community. The relationship between leaders and led in a wartime democracy is necessarily one of the underlying themes of this history. Another is the effect on the New Zealand people of those war years which covered a sizeable proportion of their corporate existence. At this point history merges into current affairs and thence into prophecy; so the historian is silent.**

**The politics of New Zealand at war, however, know no geographical boundary. Her coastal waters were occasionally visited by enemies, but her territory saw no fighting. Her own soldiers and sailors and airmen served hundreds, more usually thousands, of miles from their homes. This physical transplantation of New Zealand's most active manpower**

into other hemispheres underlined the Dominion's involvement with forces external to herself. There were thus created problems of concern to the political as well as to the military historian; for the integration of New Zealand troops into much larger forces under British or American command was not merely a technical problem. It involved national dignity and the right of a government to control its own armed forces. Eminent soldiers and sailors are not necessarily expert in the subtle conventions governing the intercourse of nations, and their professional task does not normally include the consideration of an overseas prime minister's susceptibilities. Nor is it, perhaps, easy for commanders trained in an imperial school to assess the attitude of a small, even if kindred, allied community. In military terms a division is a formation with which he is familiar. But in relation to the population from which it was drawn, the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the **Middle East** was the equivalent of twenty-five divisions of British troops; and in New Zealand's thinking the dangers which it encountered had to be considered on that scale.

In short, though the political meaning of dominion status had been fully worked out between the two wars, the formula was by no means easy to translate into terms of military co-operation. Some practical reconciliation had to be found between two principles easily enough acknowledged in theory; on the one hand, that in a military operation there must be a clear line of command and discipline, and on the other, that there must be agreement between governments on the employment of national armies. In the end, working agreement was reached but not without grave difficulties and the risk of failure. In the history of the Commonwealth the nature of these difficulties and the manner in which they were surmounted was as important as the ultimate achievement of successful co-operation, and with this field the present volume is inevitably concerned.

It is concerned, too, with the higher politics as well as with the grand strategy of the Second World War; nor is this merely a truism. One point of emphasis in any analysis of New Zealand life since the

depression must be growing independence of thinking, her claim for at least a share in controlling her own external affairs. In one sense in the nineteen-thirties an independent foreign policy was hers for the asking, for she had merely to exercise the rights inherent in dominion status. The deeper realities of the situation, however, were infinitely more complex. Even in the most familiar of well established Commonwealth relationships—that with the **United Kingdom**—and even in the handling of peacetime issues, it can be said that actual practice still fell short of recognised theory. With the best will in the world ‘consultation’ could not give full participation in the formulation of policy. Differences in patterns of thought, though barely acknowledged, were a barrier to full understanding, and as the crisis gathered speed and intensity, a small partner, far distant from immediate danger, could claim only a modest share in policy-making. Yet the **New Zealand Government** was determined to assert that claim. In face of world trends which concentrated power and responsibility in **London**, in **Washington**—and in **Moscow**—New Zealand was one of those small but active powers whose leaders strove both to understand the great forces shaping their destiny, and so far as they might, to influence them.

This volume is accordingly concerned with the problems of developing nationhood, with a small country's efforts to play a part in world politics, to assert in a wider field some of those democratic principles to which its domestic life was professedly wedded. There is a tension here which challenges study, a persistent effort to assert, if not to exaggerate, its right to be heard before issues of world-wide importance could be decided. New Zealand's action can thus be understood only in the light of these issues, and the attitudes taken towards them by the ‘Big Few’. Inevitably, therefore, this volume, which at times deals intimately with local politics, becomes entangled also with the actions of statesmen to whom New Zealand could be no more than a tiny (if occasionally irritating) factor in a master-pattern. Exploration of this field is the more important because the wartime period carried forward sharply developments of world importance which in other circumstances have moved slowly and won tardy recognition.

The predominance of American power over that of **Britain** was a fact of the greatest moment to New Zealand; so, though more remotely, was the rising importance of **Asia** as compared with **Europe** and the West. These two factors were strongly illustrated by the wartime experiences of the **Pacific** area, experiences to which New Zealand made vigorous, sometimes agitated, but generally dignified response. Discussion of her actions must at least take cognisance of the cosmic forces which, admittedly from a far distance, provoked them.

The time span, like the subject matter, involved in studying New Zealand at war can only be loosely defined. The beginning was not when war was declared, or when, some days earlier, German troops invaded **Poland**. By that time the part that New Zealand was to play had been determined. The material conditions and the mental attitudes were moulded for New Zealand—as for every belligerent—in the years of twilight and half-recognised menace. It is in these years that the historian must get his grip over the forces which controlled wartime thought and action. And he seeks in vain for an evident terminus. A global and totalitarian war was not followed by the conventional pause, by the tangle of diplomatic peace-making in which victors—and maybe vanquished too—struggled to frame a peace treaty more or less acceptable to all. On this occasion, with the main battle-front barely silent, the antagonisms of power politics were reshuffled in ways which even those with short memories found sadly inconsistent with wartime hopes. Ostensible friends became enemies, and enemies valued friends, almost overnight, all in the over-simplifying glare of publicity. Diplomatic convulsions were punctuated by local wars, as well as by bitter recriminations, and a new term, the ‘cold war’, crept in to describe a situation which, though not new, was singularly grievous and unpeaceful. Moreover, the demand for ‘unconditional surrender’ was met in **Germany** by resistance to the point of political disintegration. Even if anyone had been disposed to negotiate a treaty in conventional terms, and formally convert an armistice into peace, there was no one in the ruins of the Nazi empire with whom a treaty could have been concluded. Never before in modern history had allies possessed the field so

completely after victory; and perhaps never before had the sudden disappearance of a powerful common enemy had such immediately shattering results on a wartime coalition. Before firing ceased, and when the New Zealand Expeditionary Force was still embattled in **Italy**, the new alignment took shape; the leaders of the **United Nations** were already choosing their partners and sizing up potential enemies in the conflict that was to come.

Accordingly, the history of New Zealand at war cannot be drawn neatly to a conclusion with an analysis of New Zealand's attitude to a peace settlement that never really took place. An arbitrary break must be made in a story that is endless; and the obviously convenient terminus is the mechanical one: the end of the shooting. For New Zealand the date is, therefore, 2 September 1945, when Air Vice-Marshal Leonard Isitt signed the documents of Japanese surrender. Moreover this date, in practice, proves an excellent watershed. Certain exceptions impose themselves. In particular, the stories of wartime **Samoa** and of post-war relief—both of intimate concern to New Zealand—cannot be wound up with the Japanese surrender. Moreover, the treatment of certain developments of first-rate importance but specialised character, whose origins lie well back in the wartime period—notably the rehabilitation of servicemen, and economic adjustment in general—must be left to other hands. Such reservations made, the six-year period ending in September 1945 turns out to have a real political coherence.

It did not, as did the immediately preceding four years, mark a new change of direction. In those four years the new Labour Government had pushed forward with unprecedented rapidity the tendencies, admittedly already traditional in New Zealand, towards the creation of a welfare state. In the war years this structure was tested and maintained—its maintenance as well as the waging of war requiring various further extensions of state control. By 1945 measures which had been controversial in 1939 had become sanctified, and the question was clearly not whether the welfare state was to survive but who was to operate it, and how in detail the burden of the expense was to fall. When

Isitt laid down his pen on USS *Missouri* decisions had been made and attitudes adopted which defined the problems and set the policies New Zealand was to follow in the post-war world. In foreign affairs new decisions were clearly going to be required. The Government's enthusiasm and faith in international organisation for the maintenance of general morality and security was undiminished, but these principles had now to be related to a world in which the balance of power had profoundly altered since 1939. The world drama, no doubt, was the same. But one act had come to an end, and with the temporary disappearance from the stage of the former chief villains a general recasting was hastily in progress before the curtain again went up.



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

# CHAPTER 1 – SEPTEMBER 1939

## CHAPTER 1

*September 1939*

AT 9.30 p.m. (New Zealand time) on Sunday, 3 September 1939, a British ultimatum expired and the **United Kingdom** of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was at war with **Germany**. The official documents were precisely drawn. It was the government of the **United Kingdom** alone which gave a dramatic promise of protection to **Poland** on 31 March 1939 and transformed it into a formal and specific treaty of Mutual Assistance on 25 August. When Sir Neville Henderson gave **Germany** final notice that the promise would be honoured, he spoke for the British government alone. Neville Chamberlain's announcement to the House of Commons made it clear that 'this country' was at war, not the British Commonwealth. Ample precedent made it clear that these words were to be taken seriously. His Majesty had many governments and their independence had long entered into the field of foreign policy and treaty making. In the famous phrase of 1926, Great Britain and the Dominions were 'autonomous communities, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs'; and an autonomous community can hardly be deemed to be at war merely as a result of another autonomous community's declaration. For upwards of twenty years treaties had been so negotiated and framed as to emphasise that none of His Majesty's governments was committed unless by its own expressed wish. At the time of the **Munich** crisis it was made clear by at least three Dominions— **Canada**, South Africa, and Eire—that only their own parliaments could commit them to war; and by South Africa and Eire the right to remain neutral was firmly stressed. <sup>1</sup>

Formally, then, **Britain** stood alone at noon on 3 September, and **Germany's** abusive reply to a purely British ultimatum was addressed exclusively to His Majesty's government in the **United Kingdom**. The dominion governments were therefore compelled to take positive action. They must either take their stand beside the **United Kingdom** or proclaim neutrality. Their legal position was no longer defined by the old-fashioned principle that when the King went to war all his subjects

were at war too; nor by the new

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<sup>1</sup> Keith, in *Journal of Comparative Legislation*, Vol. XXI, p. 98.

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principles of international law embodied in the Covenant of the **League of Nations** and the Kellogg Pact. The former had been destroyed by dominion pressure towards nationhood, and the adventures of the dictators had deprived the latter of whatever reality they had possessed.

The members of the Commonwealth, in short, had to decide for themselves, and they did so each according to its established policy and constitutional processes.

Eire, as had been expected, chose neutrality, accepting the friendly assurance conveyed by the German Minister on 31 August. In South Africa there was a sharp parliamentary tussle. General Hertzog, the Prime Minister, proposed neutrality, though he also proposed to honour the engagements with the **United Kingdom** about the Simonstown base. General Smuts spoke for participation and carried cabinet and parliament with him. The Governor-General refused a dissolution and Smuts formed an administration to carry on war. The decision therefore rested plainly on parliamentary action within the framework of the law. So did that of **Canada**. When parliament had pronounced, the King's Canadian ministers advised him to declare war on behalf of that Dominion. Mr Mackenzie King, as Prime Minister, later emphasised the freedom and deliberation of the choice. Ours was not an automatic response to some mechanical organisation of Empire. **Canada's** entry into the war was the deliberate decision of free people by their own representatives in a free Parliament <sup>1</sup>.'

The result of these proceedings was that Eire remained neutral throughout the war, while South Africa was neutral for three days and **Canada** for seven days after the **United Kingdom** had gone to war. In all three cases neutrality was recognised by the **United States**, which thus

by implication gave its weighty approval to the right of the Dominions to independent action in declaring war and making peace.

**Australia**, whose Prime Minister, Mr R. G. Menzies, was a lawyer, was the only dominion to adhere to the doctrine that the King's declaration of war involved all his subjects. Mr Menzies signed and published in the *Commonwealth Gazette* a notice 'for general information' that war had broken out between Great Britain and **Germany**, and broadcast the plain statement that 'Great Britain has declared war, and that, as a result **Australia** is also at war.... There never was any doubt as to where Great Britain stood. There can be no doubt that where Great Britain stands there stand the people of the entire British world <sup>2</sup>.' This action was backed by the

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<sup>1</sup> Speech of 4 Sep 1941, quoted Dawson, *Canada 1939-41*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted Hasluck, *Australian War History, The Government and the People*, Ch. IV; Elliott and Hall. *British Commonwealth at War*, p. 21; *Round Table*, December 1939, p. 191.

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decision of a hurriedly summoned cabinet, but in principle **Australia** in 1939 proclaimed war merely by informing her people that a state of war existed in **Europe**. In the formal sense **Australia** did not declare war on **Germany**.

New Zealand acted with almost equal rapidity, but with greater respect for the forms of independent nationhood. Parliament was in session, but was not summoned. Cabinet, however, stood by to await the formal message from **Britain** which had been the agreed-upon signal for action. <sup>1</sup> It arrived a few minutes before midnight on 3 September. On the same day, so the documents stand, the New Zealand Governor-General signed a proclamation that he 'has it in command from His Majesty the King to declare that a state of war exists between His Majesty and the Government of the German Reich', and that such a state

of war had existed since the expiry of the British ultimatum, the issue of which New Zealand had previously approved. The proclamation was countersigned by Peter Fraser as acting Prime Minister. Then, at 1.55 a.m. on 4 September, a vigorously worded cable was despatched to **London**. His Majesty's Government in New Zealand reported that they had just received news that a state of war existed between the **United Kingdom** and **Germany**. They warmly associated themselves with His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, and asked the government to complete the formalities required under international law by notifying the Germans that New Zealand was at war. This was done in due course by the United States Ambassador in **Berlin**, and the notification presumably acknowledged, but records of these last steps were burnt with the archives of the American Embassy during the war.

New Zealand had declared war as thoroughly as she well could; abroad she had notified her enemies, and at home her own citizens, soldiers and law courts. As in the case of **Canada**, this was no case of automatic involvement through the mechanics of Empire. New Zealand felt it proper to indicate that she was taking action on her own account. At Westminster Mr Chamberlain noted of the Dominions as a whole that 'of their own free will and under no form of compulsion these self-governing nations' had stood beside the Homeland. In Wellington one lone, old-world voice protested against the procedure: When the King is at war, said the Hon. J. A. Hanan in the Legislative Council, so are his subjects, of whom we are a part.<sup>2</sup> For the rest, both houses of Parliament approved the 'action of the Government in advising His Excellency the Governor-General to proclaim on behalf of the Dominion of

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<sup>1</sup> Though Australia had decided to act on the shortwave broadcast of Chamberlain's statement.—Hasluck, *op. cit.*, Ch. IV.

<sup>2</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 256, p.40.

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**New Zealand the existence of a state of war.' The Leader of the Opposition said expressly that a state of war had been proclaimed 'between His Majesty's Government of New Zealand and the Government of the German Reich <sup>1</sup>.'**

**In the press as in parliament there was agreement on the propriety of what New Zealand had done. Nevertheless, the legal position was worse than obscure. The prerogative of declaring war and peace had not been entrusted by the King to his Governors-General. Only the King could declare war, or some agent specifically authorised by him. The New Zealand proclamation asserted that the King had instructed the Governor to act: but such instructions would be a grave violation of constitutional convention if issued without the advice of His Majesty's New Zealand ministers. The documents therefore require us to believe that after 11.52 p.m. the New Zealand cabinet reached a decision and cabled advice to the King in **London** in time for the King's instructions to reach the Governor-General before midnight. It seems easier to think that the New Zealand cabinet, secure in its own unanimity and in the obvious consensus of opinion in the country, had acted with commonsense and unlegalistic loyalty.**

**Cabinet's decision was made, and was approved by both houses of Parliament and by the community as being the only one conceivable. But, if there was no hesitation, there was no rejoicing. In August 1914 New Zealand people went to war with enthusiasm and noisy confidence. In 1939 there were no patriotic songs or cheering crowds in the streets. War was declared late on Sunday evening, a time when New Zealand cities are dead and New Zealanders habitually house-bound. Moreover, schooled during the **Munich** crisis to an excellent system of broadcasting the news, their ears would be tuned to the domestic radio, not to the spirit of adventure which dwells in excited crowds. Yet there was a deeper cause for quiet. What many New Zealanders had seen during 1914–18 and, even more, what all New Zealanders had been told in the nineteen-thirties, was not likely to encourage jingoism or mafficking. Also, in September 1939 New Zealand for the first time faced**

a struggle in which the outcome was obviously distant and even uncertain. Sentiment could not disguise the fact that **Britain's** relative strength was far less than in 1914. It was clear that **Italy** and **Japan** might well be added to the enemies of the First World War, while the support of **Russia** and the **United States** was at best problematical.

The new tone was apparent in the statements made on 4

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 20. Cf. explicit later statement by F. Jones (Minister of Defence in 1939): 'it was quite evident when the recent war broke out and **Britain** declared war, **Britain** did not declare war for New Zealand. New Zealand followed Great Britain and declared war against **Germany** on that occasion'.—*Report of proceedings of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Wellington*, Nov-Dec 1950, Foreign Affairs, 254.

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September by Peter Fraser, who had been deputising for Mr M. J. Savage while the latter was recovering from an operation, and by Savage himself on the following day. 'Not in anger but in sorrow, not in lightheartedness, but with heavy hearts, not in hatred but with a grave sense of great responsibility to mankind and to the future of humanity, not in malice and revenge, but with a prayer of peace on our lips, the British people today dedicate themselves to the work of overthrowing the oppressor and freeing the peoples of the earth from bondage and slavery to a ruthless and cruel tyranny'. Similarly Savage emphasised that 'none of us has any hatred for the German people', that the true enemy was Nazism, 'militant and insatiable paganism'. 'To destroy it but not the great nation which it has so cruelly cheated, is the task of those who have taken up arms against Nazism.' He concluded his speech with words which at once assumed New Zealand's independent nationhood and stressed the link with **Britain**—'Both with gratitude for the past, and with confidence in the future, we range ourselves without fear beside **Britain**. Where she goes, we go, where she stands, we stand. We are only a small and young nation, but we are one and all a band of brothers, and we march forward with a union of hearts and wills to a common



destiny.'

It is of course impossible to ascribe with confidence any positive feelings to the community as a whole. But, in so far as it was sufficiently definite to find expression, New Zealand opinion thoroughly justified Savage's declaration of unanimity. The pacifists, who alone opposed the war from its first hours, were numerically insignificant. So were the communists, who took some weeks to collect their thoughts and come out in opposition. More important, but intangible and undefinable, was the uneasiness of many thoughtful New Zealanders who had grown up under the shadow of the First World War with its ideals and disillusionment, leading on to the scepticism of the inter-war period. There were many young men and women who were dissatisfied with the main trends of British policy towards the League, towards Mussolini and towards **Hitler**. They were unconvinced by Chamberlain's last-minute change of heart in respect to **Hitler**, and were convinced still less by his claim that all things possible were being done to enlist Russian support. There was, in fact, a substantial current of opinion which was violently opposed to Hitlerism but was uneasy about the leadership and strategy of the struggle against it. This uneasiness, though it coloured New Zealand politics and kept wits alert, offered no immediate alternative policy to those who were neither pacifist nor communist, that is, the vast majority of the community. For many Chamberlain was the peaceful English-man, who had gone to all lengths to avoid war and ultimately led his people, at last united, into an unavoidable conflict. For most of the minority who seriously questioned either his motives or his methods, he had at least—and at last—taken a stand against the forces of evil which they had long denounced.

There was no more doubt about what New Zealand would do in 1939 than there was in 1914, but what she did was done in a different form and in a different spirit. Also remarkable was the quality of the unanimity. As will be seen, the absence of opposition cannot be explained on the grounds of an uninterrupted docility. Nor was residuary criticism swept away by a storm of patriotic enthusiasm. It had dissolved

**before the revelation that the world contained aggressive states which were apparently insatiable; and the evolution of domestic politics had forged the basis of national unity. Yet there had been times during the preceding quarter-century when such a measure of general agreement would have appeared unlikely of attainment. The Government's decision on 3 September 1939, inevitable as it was, and New Zealand's subsequent wartime policy, had in fact a dramatic aspect which can only be perceived in an historical perspective.**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 2 – THE WORKING OF ‘IMPERIALISM’

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Working of 'Imperialism'*

**IN the New Zealand of the nineteen-twenties the word 'imperialism' was commonly used in a sense far from pejorative. It referred to the spirit expressed in 1930 by that very typical New Zealander, G. W. Forbes, when he said that 'It is only by strengthening the ties which bind us to the rest of the Empire that we can hope to realise the general benefits that we all hope for. In view of the condition of the world, it is our duty to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Motherland and our sister dominions and endeavour to develop to the utmost that spirit of unity which I believe is necessary for the welfare of our Empire <sup>1</sup>.' Forbes spoke as Prime Minister. The Leader of the Opposition, J. G. Coates, supported him 'in everything that will lead to a wider, a larger, and a united Empire.' By unity both men plainly meant close association with Great Britain and acceptance of British leadership. They were in this sense Imperialists, and both main parties revelled in this robust, if old-fashioned, word: nor would either of them yield to the other pride of place in 'Imperialistic sentiment' and 'standing for the Empire'. <sup>2</sup> In this they fairly represented the community. It was with justice that **Lord Milner** in 1925 hailed Massey as both 'the true interpreter of New Zealand' and 'the most staunch, the most steady, and the most consistent of Imperial statesmen'. <sup>3</sup>**

**New Zealand had taken no part in the pressure for definition of dominion status which led to the Statute of Westminster, and Mr Forbes went to the Imperial Conference in 1930 with 'no complaints and no demands', though with apprehension lest fellow dominions should combine to loosen the framework of the Commonwealth. When New Zealand departed from its attitude of entire satisfaction with the *status quo* was to stress the need for greater cohesion rather than for greater freedom. With this attitude there went a tendency to minimise the importance of consultation between the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand on matters of foreign policy. In February 1923 Sir Francis Bell, ablest of lawyers and already an elder statesman, had described from**

<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 225, p. 539.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. 196, p. 485 and *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 11 May 1925.

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how New Zealand preserved detachment in face of fellow dominions' interest in foreign affairs. 'I cannot remember any instance in which we have been consulted on such matters where the answer had not been in stereotyped form: "New Zealand is content to be bound by the determination of His Majesty's Government in **London**.'" To this testimony he added a commonsense criticism of the claim then fashionable in other dominions that they should be 'consulted' before imperial foreign policy was determined. 'The matter that concerns us is how far it is of any benefit to anyone that we should be consulted; and, if we were consulted, is there any man in New Zealand who thinks that we are really fit to judge? By "we" I mean Government. I am quite sure the Opposition would say that we are unfit. I am a member of the Government myself, and I have no sense of fitness to advise the Imperial Government in matters of foreign policy <sup>1</sup>.'

Yet New Zealand's 'Imperialism' was in fact never quite so unconditional as the warmth of loyal words suggested. Francis Bell himself gave an important clue in the very speech in which he spoke misleadingly of New Zealand's stereotyped comments on foreign policy; for he mentioned how he and his fellow delegate had spoken up emphatically in the Assembly of the **League of Nations** when an issue arose—that of mandates—in which New Zealand was 'essentially and directly interested'. <sup>2</sup> Massey had already participated at the Versailles Conference in a 'front' of the interested dominions which, independently of the **United Kingdom**, opposed Wilson's mandate proposals. In each case, of course, the motive of New Zealand interest was **Western Samoa**.

In 1923, however, New Zealand, on Bell's advice, formally rejected the Imperial Act of 1914 on nationality on the ground that her special circumstances had not been adequately dealt with; and New Zealand remained out of step with the rest of the Empire until in 1928 Bell pronounced himself satisfied. <sup>3</sup> Forbes himself could be exceedingly blunt when British policy conflicted with his wishes in a field where he had special interests. Moreover, the famous remark attributed to the British Dominions Secretary ('Mr Forbes, we were delighted to meet you, but thank God you are going') was quoted with appreciation by hot 'Imperialists' who expected their Prime Minister to 'speak his mind fearlessly, and back his statements by arguments <sup>4</sup>' when British and New Zealand policies diverged. There remains in Bell's dictum a solid core of truth. New Zealand 'Imperialists' were 'content to be bound by the determination of

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 199, pp. 33–4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, *Bell*, p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> NZPD, Vol. 228, p. 558.

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His Majesty's Government in **London**' on the numerous issues in which they were not seriously interested and on the many others in which their own views coincided with those of the British government. Nevertheless the confidential communications exchanged during the terms of the first two British Labour governments make it clear how much New Zealand acquiescence in British foreign policy depended on a substantial identity of political colour between **London** and **Wellington**, and show that where this was lacking a policy of being *plus royaliste que le roi* could in itself be a source of independent opinion. These documents, indeed, deprive of much of its apparent novelty the

**'independent' foreign policy pursued by a New Zealand Labour government when the Conservatives were in office in England.**

**Though on the whole Massey seems to have refrained from protesting against those items which irked him in the foreign policy of the first MacDonald government (January-November 1924), he sent on 11 March 1924 a most sharply worded response to the British Government's decision not to proceed with the development of the **Singapore** base—'I regret exceedingly that the Government of the **United Kingdom** do not intend to proceed with what is looked upon as one of the most important proposals connected with the defence of the Empire.... **India, Australia,** New Zealand, and a number of Crown Colonies are intensely concerned in this matter and are looking to the present British Government to remember that every country of the Empire and every citizen of the Empire are entitled to protection from the possibility of attack by a foreign foe.... You say that "your Government stands for international co-operation through a strengthened and enlarged **League of Nations**." In reply to that I must say that if the defence of the Empire is to depend on the **League of Nations** only, then it may turn out to have been a pity that the League was ever brought into being.'**

**The Singapore base was obviously one of those issues in which New Zealand was 'essentially and directly interested.' However, during the term of the second Labour Government (June 1929–August 1931) action which the **New Zealand Government** clearly regarded as showing an irresponsible attitude towards imperial interests soon made the whole issue of consultation a very live one. On 10 August 1929 Sir Joseph Ward thus addressed Ramsay MacDonald:**

**Will you allow me in a helpful spirit to call attention to one aspect of the relations between H.M. Government in the **United Kingdom** and H.M. Governments in the Dominions in connection with such questions, for example, as naval defence, **Singapore,** the Optional Clause of the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice, Egypt, and **Russia.****



I do not question the fact that H.M. Government in the **United Kingdom** are much more directly concerned than the Governments of the Dominions in these subjects and I readily recognise your wish to implement your policy without delay. At the same time H.M. Government in the **United Kingdom** act in such matters not only on their own behalf but in a very real sense as the agent or trustee of H.M. other Governments and no decision taken by the Government in the **United Kingdom** can fail to have a direct and important effect upon the Dominions.

Our feeling is that there are disadvantages in moving too fast in such matters, that sufficient time has not been available for a study of your proposals and that there is much to be gained by taking the point of view of the Dominions in ample time to allow of a reasoned expression of their opinion before a decision is reached in **London**....

So far as public record went New Zealand remained a dutiful daughter dominion, except when her economic interests were involved, or some political matter in which she was directly concerned. Yet as early as 1929, when confronted with a distasteful trend in British policy, she spoke sharply on matters of principle, and on techniques of Imperial consultation. Other cables sent at this time confirm considerable New Zealand interest in issues geographically remote and not related to her immediate material well-being. New Zealand and **Australia** were so interested in the negotiations with the Egyptian Government over the **Suez Canal** that the **United Kingdom** suggested that they should appoint representatives to keep in touch with the **United Kingdom** negotiators. New Zealand nominated Thomas Wilford, her High Commissioner in **London**. On 9 April 1930, after attending a sitting of the conference, he cabled to the **New Zealand Government** suggesting that it express to the United Kingdom Government its concern for the maintenance of communications through the Canal—which it did—and that it should make a press statement on the matter—which characteristically it did not. Nor did the notification of the **United Kingdom's** intention to resume diplomatic relations with **Russia** pass without an expression of

uneasiness—‘His Majesty’s Government in New Zealand look with some misgiving upon the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; especially in view of the outstanding questions of propaganda and debts. They appreciate the reference to these subjects made in the proposed telegram to the Soviet Government and assume that due care will be observed to ensure that His Majesty’s Governments are not subjected to subversive propaganda.’

After the death of Sir Joseph Ward Mr Forbes carried in his notes to the 1930 Imperial Conference a list of bombshell communications from the **United Kingdom**, when the Dominion was asked to comment on matters of major importance practically by return of cable: for example, a proposal to summon five powers to a naval conference reached **Wellington** for comment a week before the invitations were to be despatched; and the text of an important joint statement by the Prime Minister of the **United Kingdom** and the President of the **United States** two days before it was to be issued. At the conference itself, if Forbes did not ‘complain’, he pointed out rather sharply that this kind of thing did not amount to consultation, that it was unfair to expect any government to give decisions at a few days’ notice on matters of far-reaching importance, that New Zealand resented being hustled in this way, and was only restrained from more effective protest by ‘the paramount desirability of maintaining commonwealth unity’.

Sharp divergence of view seems to have been confined to times when New Zealand felt that the Government in **London** was careless of imperial interests; yet it would be wrong to suggest that the interest of New Zealand governments in foreign affairs was confined to such periods. At the Imperial Conference of 1926 Coates, though without any suggestion of reproach, had put forward proposals for improving the machinery of consultation. He was also responsible for the establishment in the same year of a small organisation to advise the Prime Minister on foreign affairs and other matters. The Prime Minister’s Department was established with **F. D. Thomson** as first Permanent Head, and under him a staff of three including C. A. Berendsen as

**Imperial Affairs Officer. These officials furnished Coates with voluminous notes for the 1926 conference, including a comment under the heading ‘ Spain’ which anticipates in a remarkable fashion the stand which was to be taken by the Labour Government ten years later. It was observed that ‘Opinion in New Zealand is alarmed at the extension of the movement indicated by events, for example in Russia, Italy, Spain, Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, in the direction of imposing and maintaining forms of Government by force.’ In view of ‘the widespread agitation in favour of direct action in industrial affairs’ and of communist propaganda, it was ‘feared that action on these lines, which appears to be received with remarkable equanimity not only in the countries concerned but generally throughout the world, will tend to spread from the political to the industrial sphere, and in the present delicate industrial situation may have very serious effects. Matters in Spain do not in general affect New Zealand directly, but it is considered that His Majesty’s Government should act with great caution in expressing any toleration or approval of such *coups d’etat* which it is thought must eventually have a repercussion on British affairs.’**

**In his speech on foreign affairs at the conference Coates made only a brief and vague reference to the matter, but the line of argument in the notes does seem to correspond to something constant in the New Zealand attitude. Primo de Rivera’s coup in Spain, like Mussolini’s aggression there and elsewhere in the next decade, set too dangerous an example to the forces of lawlessness everywhere to be accepted with complacency. That the object of fear in the earlier instance was internal subversion by communists, and in the latter, military aggression by fascists, should not obscure New Zealand’s continuing anxiety lest expediency should tempt governments less morally robust to compromise with evil.**

**None of these evidences of independent thought and action can qualify the basic statements with which this chapter opened. The leaders of New Zealand—Bell and Ward, Massey, Forbes and Coates—in their different ways were at once true interpreters of New Zealand and**

**staunch Imperial statesmen. They all appreciated fully the necessary relationship between a World Power and its smaller dependencies. Yet dominion status was to them no empty concept, and their loyalty to British leadership was neither blind nor dumb. If New Zealand's public policy within the Commonwealth be compared with that of Ireland, for instance, or South Africa, or even Canada, the contrast is sharp enough; yet this is a comparison which in most contexts it is mistaken to invite. The root questions are whether, in principle, New Zealand had made sufficiently clear her intention to participate when it suited her in the privileges of dominion status, and whether this intention had been recognised in practice, both in Wellington and in London. In a field where definitions are difficult and precision apt to be swept aside in the flow of political give and take, it nevertheless seems clear from the record that the answer to these questions is clearly affirmative. Beneath the so-called 'mother complex' an adult tradition lived on in the consistent attitude of statesmen who gloried in the title of 'Imperialist'.**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 3 – THE RADICAL CRITICISM

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Radical Criticism*

**WITHIN** the broad stream of New Zealand's external policy up to 1935 there were small elements of independence, which were potentially important, though in general courteously concealed from publicity. It made no great difference which of the two parties held power; they were not deeply divided with regard to external affairs, or indeed (after the death of Seddon) in internal affairs either. During the 1914–18 war, however, a third political party emerged which neither in domestic nor in foreign policies shared the basic assumptions common to the two older parties.

The Labour Party had its formal origin in July 1916. It drew together existing left-wing groups and was led with great energy and resource by **H. E. Holland** and the men who, after his death in 1933, were to govern New Zealand during the Second World War. Behind the political party stood the trade unions, still smarting from the severe defeats of the pre-war strikes. The leaders of this Labour movement, if the term may be used to cover groups which only gradually gathered cohesion, had a strong traditional suspicion of Imperialism as exploitation, and of war as a deception practised by governments. In 1914 they had, like their colleagues overseas, recognised the call of a national crisis; yet radical suspicion remained, and an anti-war tradition. Suspicion naturally ripened into outright dissent, and by 1916 the leaders of the Labour Party had become bitterly critical of the Massey government's wartime policy. In that year, out of a combination of personal judgment, radical tradition and the needs of political controversy, the leaders of the movement formulated clearly a threefold wartime policy which deeply influenced the Labour Party's thinking well into the period of the Second World War.

The first element was an opposition to conscription so vehement that, at the time of the second Anti-Conscription Conference in December 1916, 'almost half the effective platform propagandists of the

Labour Movement were placed behind prison bars'.<sup>1</sup> The second was the demand that 'conscription of wealth' must

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<sup>1</sup> **Holland**, *Armageddon or Calvary*, p. 14.

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precede conscription of men. The third element was the advocacy of negotiated peace. In January 1916 Labour Party leaders cautiously expressed the suspicion that the continuance of the war might be due to Allied intransigence, and demanded that the Allies should state their peace-terms and so 'assist the German Social Democratic movement in creating a large peace sentiment in **Germany**. The war has reached a stage when the intelligence of the world must assert itself to extricate humanity from the impasse into which military bureaucracy has led it<sup>1</sup>.' Later the demand became more explicit. In January 1918 the party newspaper, the *Maoriland Worker*, urged the opening of peace negotiations. 'Is it worth while crucifying humanity for another two years if a satisfactory settlement can be secured by negotiations?'<sup>2</sup> And this demand was repeated at the party's annual conference in July.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally enough, Labour's attitude was publicly denounced by spokesmen of other parties as unpatriotic to the verge of sedition; yet it received considerable if unpublicised support. Sir Francis Bell himself was more than doubtful about the proceedings against the imprisoned Labour leaders,<sup>4</sup> and a series of remarkable Labour victories at by-elections in 1918 suggest that by that time war-weariness was sufficiently general to make Labour's wartime policy a political asset rather than a liability. In its context, the attitude between 1914 and 1918 of the men who were to be New Zealand's cabinet in September 1939 was not a violent aberration from the country's normal trends. It was rather the ardent expression of viewpoints which, by and large, were even then regarded as not wholly unreasonable by many of those who rejected them.

Except in a few cases, Labour's policy was not based on pacifism in the strict sense of the word—a renunciation of violence in all



circumstances—nor, in its opposition to conscription, on the view that the State had no right in any circumstances to force its citizens to undertake military service. Much is explained by the inheritance of bitterness from the **Waihi, Huntly** and maritime strikes just before the war, the Massey government's effective strike-breaking methods and subsequent legislation. In France the conscription law had been used in 1910 to break a railway strike and many workers feared that something similar might happen in New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> Manifesto of first Anti-Conscription Conference, *Evening Post*, 28 Jan 1916.

<sup>2</sup> *Maoriland Worker*, 9 Jan 1918, and Thorn, *Peter Fraser*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, *New Zealand Labour Party, 1916–1935*, p. 158. Unpublished thesis, **Victoria University College** library.

<sup>4</sup> In his correspondence Bell, at that time leader of the Upper House and shortly to become Attorney-General, emphasised the distinction 'between advocacy of the repeal of the Military Service Act and advocacy of resistance to that Act. The first cannot be sedition however you take it, and yet in my view the Magistrates are dealing out the same sentences in respect of speeches which to my untutored mind do not seem to go beyond the constitutional right of advocacy of repeal'.—Stewart, *Bell*, p. 135.

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Opposition to conscription, therefore, could derive not only from basic views on the nature of war and of freedom, but from practical apprehensions as to what might happen later on. Workers who in the view of Bishop Spratt did not lack patriotism feared that a conscript army might be used 'to hold the workers in subjection when the critical after war period is reached <sup>1</sup>.' Moreover, if conscription was socially dangerous it was, in the view of Labour spokesmen, as yet unnecessary.

If the people were agreed on war, it was argued, voluntaryism must produce the men, provided the soldier and his dependants are adequately cared for; therefore 'conscript enough wealth to set free enough men to go as willing volunteers'.<sup>2</sup> 'To conscript a man's wealth is a less serious invasion of personal liberties than to conscript a man's person, and in a struggle for freedom the conscription of wealth must precede the conscription of flesh and blood and be fully tried before the latter is seriously considered<sup>3</sup>.'

Conscription of wealth was defined as meaning that 'the land, mines, mills, factories, ships, banks and all the collectively used means of wealth production shall be seized and operated for the collective benefit of the people during the war, and shall remain the property of the people after the war<sup>4</sup>.' Needless to say, this proposal was made for the purpose of discomfiting the advocates of conscription rather than with any serious expectation of its adoption. The phrase was also used by Labour speakers in the 1914–18 war with some vaguer and apparently less drastic meaning than that given to it in the manifesto. In its origin it was less a practical proposal than a rhetorical device to hammer home the Labour charge that the Government 'fastened the chains of militarism on the young life of the Dominion, but ... cringed and grovelled before the profiteer and exploiter<sup>5</sup>.'

It will be seen that Labour opposed certain wartime measures that it enforced twenty-five years later and advocated others that it did not put into practice when in power. This was duly pointed out during 1939–45 by its critics of both left and right. But there was more consistency in the attitude of some at least of the Labour leaders than a brief statement of the facts might indicate. A remarkable letter written by Peter Fraser and published in the *Evening Post* on 22 February 1916 indicates a point of view which he would have had little reason to modify as a justification of his later policy as a leader of the nation at war. Replying to the criticism that the

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 7 Feb 1916; *Maoriland Worker*, 2 Feb 1916.

<sup>2</sup> McCombs, *NZPD*, Vol. 176, p. 507.

<sup>3</sup> Manifesto of Anti-Conscription Conference, 27 Jan 1916; *Maoriland Worker*, 2 Feb 1916 and *Evening Post*, 28 Jan 1916.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Maoriland Worker*, 13 Feb 1918.

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**Social Democrats were ‘fiddling while Rome burnt’, he wrote that it was surely better to do this than to ‘calculate in cold blood how much personal profit could be made out of the holocaust, which is in plain language what our present-day trade snatchers are doing.’ The letter continued:**

**It really is an insult to **Britain** to accuse her of mere practical nationalism. To their credit it can be said that the force which moved the British people was mainly their sympathy with **Belgium**. **Britain** is more international than ever she was.**

**Before the war many things advocated by Social Democrats were said to be Utopian. Today they are accomplished facts. Only by adopting instalments of State Socialism could the Allies carry on the war. The failure of private enterprise has been an outstanding feature of the situation, hitherto. Who can doubt than one reason of **Germany's** success on land (now probably nearing its limit) was her superior State organisation? The pity is that there should be such splendid organisation for such base ends. When the nations are as well organised for peace and economic justice as **Germany** was for war Social Democracy will be even to its opponents something more substantial than a dream.**

**It is true that certain prominent Labour men were pacifists, and that the party took up the case of certain conscientious objectors who had**

been maltreated. It is true, too, that in the first years of peace the issue was complicated by vehement expressions of anti-war sentiment. These, together with the personal pacifism of some individuals during the war, created the traditional belief that in this 'free lance period' the Labour Party was marked by 'militant pacifism'.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is little proof that at any time it departed so widely from a 'responsible' attitude. On the whole, its criticism of wartime policy in 1914–18 arose from its political suspicion of its own and other Allied governments (a suspicion shared by the Australian Labour movement) rather than from doctrinaire pacifism.

The main evidence in the contrary sense derives from the immediately post-war years. In 1920 the party conference did in fact modify its defence policy in an apparently pacifist sense. Since 1913 it had demanded the abolition of compulsory military training, this to be followed by the creation of a volunteer army 'with standard wages while on duty'. The suggested volunteer army was now dropped. When this course had been unsuccessfully urged in 1919, some of the arguments were strictly pacifist: that the use of armed force was never justified and that 'an unarmed nation depending upon moral force and passive resistance was the very best defence New Zealand could possibly have.' The suggestion had then been supported by two men who were later prominent in Labour's wartime cabinet, by one of them, Walter Nash, with the remark 'that

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, Vol. 97, p. 215, December 1934.

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an unarmed nation would be in an impregnable position<sup>1</sup>.' When, however, the proposed change in the party's official policy was actually carried in 1920 it is more than doubtful whether the conference was thinking in terms of non-resistance. The main recorded argument stressed the fear that military force might be used 'to subjugate the workers' in New Zealand as 'was happening today in **Ireland, India, Egypt**'; and, it was said, 'a voluntary army [would be] infinitely worse than a compulsory one under present conditions'.<sup>2</sup> The conference also

passed a resolution 'Recognising that modern wars waged by the Capitalist Governments mean, in essence, the massacre of the workers of one country by the workers of another for the financial profit of a few' and urging 'the workers of belligerent countries to reply to a declaration of war by a general strike <sup>3</sup>.'

In considering the resolutions of the 1920 conference it should be remembered that they were passed at the time when the **British Labour Party** was threatening a general strike in the event of British intervention against **Russia** <sup>4</sup> in the war between that country and **Poland**. That the passage of the extremist resolutions in 1920 was largely due to what seemed the imminent possibility of further British military operations against Soviet Russia is suggested by the 1921 conference's shelving of a resolution on war similar to that passed in 1920, but milder in that it omitted the proposal for a general strike. <sup>5</sup> After two or three years of uncertainty the 1924 conference came out with the declaration that it 'wholeheartedly supports the British Labour Government in its efforts to secure disarmament by agreement among the nations, and declares that it will be prepared to face the problem of defence on assuming office as the Government of the Dominion in the light of that policy, and will be guided by the circumstances prevailing at that time as to the extent to which disarmament can be achieved or defence is necessary <sup>6</sup>.'

Cautious and vague as this statement was, it amounted to an unmistakable recantation of the fiery words of 1920. In the exceptional circumstances of that year prominent Labour men went far in the direction of pacifism; but for the party as a whole it was at most a passing phase. Outright pacifism was no significant part of Labour's

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<sup>1</sup> *Maoriland Worker*, 6 Aug 1919.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Sep 1920.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Sep 1920.

<sup>4</sup> The conference passed a resolution condemning the Allies' attempt to restore the Tsarist regime and a cable congratulating the **British Labour Party** on its stand in the matter was signed (among others) by the President of the **New Zealand Labour Party**.—Brown, *Labour Party*, p. 160, and *Maoriland Worker*, 8 Sep 1920.

<sup>5</sup> *Maoriland Worker*, 7 Sep 1921.

<sup>6</sup> *NZ Worker*, 11 Jun 1924. The *Maoriland Worker* became the *New Zealand Worker* in February 1924, which was in turn succeeded by the *Standard* in October 1935.

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contribution to the country's political thinking. What it did contribute was a persistent suspicion of war and war makers, a traditional sympathy for conscientious objectors, and an increasingly definite claim that, if war came, New Zealand should fight through her own considered decision, which would involve independent thought, and possibly divergence from British leadership.

In the nineteen-twenties this was a matter of principle rather than of political substance; for there was little immediate hope of deflecting New Zealand policy or of modifying significantly the normal preoccupation of most New Zealanders (including members of the Labour Party) with domestic economics. When Labour's core of seasoned political leaders treated world issues as being of practical concern to the intelligent New Zealander, and discussed them with knowledge and conviction, they were scarcely representative of the Labour movement, and still less of New Zealand as a whole. Behind the scenes New Zealand prime ministers might occasionally express candid disagreement with British policy when it veered to the left, just as Labour leaders openly denounced it while it kept to the main road; but for the great majority of New Zealanders world history was a drama to be observed from a

distance without any notion of audience participation. The results of the play might, indeed, impinge on New Zealand, but among the actors was a hazily conceived entity, the British Empire, into whose practised hands most New Zealanders, by deliberate choice or by lethargy and acquiescence, resigned their country's interests. It is difficult for members of a dissenting minority to alter so predominant an attitude. However, by challenging it they can bring it to the surface and once this is done it may lose, for a while at least, something of its power. By the example of persistently continuing to exist they may keep open the possibility of alternative forms of action. By continuing to assert a reasonably coherent point of view they may gradually accumulate a body of inaudible but potentially powerful and disciplined sympathy.

In short, beneath an appearance of established traditionalism, old foundations can be undermined and new ones laid on which politicians may later erect novel and spectacular edifices; and something of this nature happened in New Zealand between 1920 and 1935. In Parliament, that admirable sounding board for public opinion, the conventional views might prevail but the unconventional never lacked outspoken advocacy. Labour speakers were fond of remarking that many New Zealanders rejected 'the duty to take up the cry that comes from **London** and repeat it like so many parrots <sup>1</sup>.' Some went so far as to denounce 'the blunders of

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<sup>1</sup> P. Fraser, *NZPD*, Vol. 200, p. 788.

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British statesmen', <sup>1</sup> and claim that New Zealand defence expenditure was caused by such blunders. The characteristic line of Labour's most forceful debaters, however, was insistence that New Zealand should abandon her swaddling clothes, cease to take pride in her immature and inferior status, and contribute to Imperial defence the strength which comes from having a mind and soul of one's own. <sup>2</sup> External and defence policy, it was urged, should be guided by information made available to the people and Parliament of New



Zealand. <sup>3</sup> It was not enough that the Government should advocate a given course with the presumed approval of the **United Kingdom**: evidence should be produced and arguments advanced. 'The time had arrived,' said Fraser in 1934, 'when the House and the country should be taken into the full confidence not merely of Cabinet, but also of the Imperial Government <sup>4</sup>.'

One significant symptom of new developments was a trickle of intellectual criticism directed at New Zealand's traditional acquiescence: her 'Mother complex' was described as such to be derided. Another and more significant fact was the conscious development, in a generation which had known war (and later depression), of something increasingly resembling a New Zealand attitude towards life in general. It would be too ambitious to speak of a New Zealand culture. Yet something was stirring, to find expression among writers and painters, among scholars and journalists as well as among politicians, which produced a sharper mental climate. The difference between Allen Curnow's *Book of New Zealand Verse* and its predecessor, *Kowhai Gold*, shows that it was not only in politics that the ferment was working. There was in the politics of men like **Holland** and Fraser and in the writings of Mason and Sargeson and Glover, of Lee and Mulgan, something which we now think of as typical of the place as well as the time.

It is impossible to distinguish this indigenous element in New Zealand's life from the effect of influences shared by New Zealand with the outside world, particularly Great Britain. This was in most places a period of disillusionment, and one symptom was the spate of war novels in England in 1929–30. Most of these, of which the prototype was the German *All Quiet on the Western Front*, suggested in the words of a contemporary critic that 'the Great War was engineered by knaves or fools on both sides, that the men who died in it were driven like beasts to the slaughter, and died like beasts without their deaths helping any cause or doing any good <sup>5</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> McKeen, 1933, *NZPD*, Vol. 233, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 228, p. 580 ( C. Carr); p. 621 (H. G. R. Mason); Milner, *New Zealand's Interests and Policies in the Far East*, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 197, p. 86 ( H. E. Holland); Vol. 239, p. 755 (W. E. Barnard).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 240, p. 381.

<sup>5</sup> Falls, *War Books*, p. ix.

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ripened into a broad and undefined pacifism which according to Stanley Baldwin reached its peak in 1933–34. <sup>1</sup> It was in the former year that the Oxford Union's resolution not to fight for King and Country provided the most publicised expression of pacifist sentiment in **Britain**. The pathetic failure of the Disarmament Conference, on which high hopes had been desperately built, **Hitler's** seizure of power in **Germany**, and above all, the long course of the economic depression, all went to sharpen men's disquiet and shake still further their faith in traditional policies. The unique importance of the depression was that its immediate and bitter experience produced indignation far beyond the ranks of habitual radicals. The faith of innumerable not very reflective people in the wisdom of their rulers, and in the adequacy of the way in which their community was managed, was shaken as perhaps never before.

It is easy enough to trace this trend in New Zealand. In 1922 and 1923, for instance, there was a carry over of triumph from a victorious war and, as in wartime propaganda, an assumption that nations could be firmly divided into the good and the bad, the aggressors and the

defenders of civilisation. At the threat of war in 1922 a contemporary observer could claim that ‘a thrill of patriotism and a deep sense of national obligation ran through the country’ as men besieged the recruiting offices.<sup>2</sup> By 1930, however, a conservative government abolished conscription largely on grounds of economy, but also because ‘we cannot ignore the strong feeling in favour of world peace and the opposition to militarism which has grown up not only in New Zealand, but in most other civilised countries<sup>3</sup>.’ By 1933 Anzac Day services, once the occasion for teaching ‘the Empire builders of the future the lessons of Anzac’, and for telling the story of British fights for liberty, gave opportunity for clergymen to discuss the tragedy of war. This was the period when shops and libraries were full of books, fiction and otherwise, whose moral was the horror and futility of war, the tragedy that both sides always regarded their own cause as righteous and purely defensive, the wickedness of armament manufacturers, and the need to apply in the international field the principles of law and police action which had proved so fruitful within each state. The same ideas found their way into the schoolroom—a circumstance of some importance since the schoolroom contained those who were to be men of military age in the years 1939–45. A study of social attitudes in the *New Zealand School Journal* points out that from 1929 onwards articles expressing anti-war sentiments begin to

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, Vol. 317, cols. 1144–5.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, Vol. 13, p. 452.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Cobbe, Minister of Defence, *NZPD*, Vol. 225, p. 303.

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appear in the *Journal*. By 1932 ‘Detestation and abhorrence of war’ are stressed and the broad social aim is ‘to serve the interests of all<sup>1</sup>.’ An article, ‘The Unknown Warrior’, describes how the soldier ‘goes out to live in mud and filth and die a lonely and horrible death far from his home and all that he loved.... the finest flower of every household, all

**offered as a sacrifice on the insane and monstrous altar of war'.<sup>2</sup>**

**In brief, by 1933 and 1934 it had become not only possible but almost conventional for New Zealanders to speak with scepticism of modern warfare and even use terms of outright pacifism which would have been wholly out of key ten years before. It is not surprising that these ideas were still to be found in the utterances of the Labour Party. In the debate on the 1934 estimates Labour speakers criticised the Government for spending money 'to defend the people against problematical attacks' by foreigners instead of against 'the certain and continuous ravages of poverty and distress<sup>3</sup>.' New Zealand should keep out of 'the competitive armaments campaign' which would inevitably lead to war, as in 1914: she could thus help to frustrate the armament manufacturers who here, as elsewhere, were 'stirring up enmity, discontent, and distrust<sup>4</sup>.' Yet the remarkable thing is that on the whole the pacifist and radical tendencies were becoming subdued in the Labour Party in the same years that they were infiltrating into the very citadels of conservatism.**

**The reason for this development lay in domestic politics. The party and its supporters were losing the feeling that they were in the state but not of it. As Labour steadily increased its representation in Parliament and as the possibility of its becoming the government by constitutional means became something other than a Utopian dream, its temper softened. The root and branch abolition of capitalism and the inauguration of the new socialist society faded from the party's propaganda to be replaced by more specific measures of reform, the doctrinaire significance of which was not laboured. The gulf narrowed between the advocates of the new society and the defenders of the old and there came to be an area of common ground on matters such as defence or foreign policy in which national rather than class interests were seen to be involved. The closing of the gap is illustrated from the side of conservatism in the abolition of compulsory military training by the Forbes government. It is illustrated from the other side by the increasingly conciliatory nature of the speeches made by Labour**

<sup>1</sup> Jenkins, *Social Attitudes in the New Zealand School Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, *op. cit.* p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Barnard, *NZPD*, Vol. 239, p. 755.

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, *NZPD*, Vol. 239, pp. 791–2.

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speakers urging this measure in the House of Representatives in the years immediately preceding its adoption. In 1929, for example, Mr Jordan had urged that if the old system were abolished ‘those who desire to render military service will still be able to do so under a voluntary system <sup>1</sup>.’ In the following year, Walter Nash as National Secretary of the party issued a statement stressing that a Labour government ‘would take all the steps that are necessary to ensure proper organisation for the defence of the Dominion. Its policy would be definitely determined by the extent to which disarmament had been achieved by agreement’. <sup>2</sup>

As early as 1927 Nash, then Secretary of the Labour Party, but not yet a member of Parliament, had participated in an odd episode which was perhaps significant evidence of the evolution of New Zealand opinion. In that year the **New Zealand Government** was severely criticised by Labour spokesmen for contributing to the **Singapore** base; one main ground for such criticism, especially by **H. E. Holland**, was that the construction of the base would be offensive to **Japan**. At a conference in **Honolulu**, however, Nash as a private citizen was called upon for a report on New Zealand opinion. He explained <sup>3</sup> that the contribution to **Singapore** was contested, and summarised the arguments; but he added that a majority of New Zealanders would support the Government's decision on the ground that in their view the Navy was a major instrument for world peace, and that it could not exercise its peacemaking function in the **Pacific** without the base.

Nash's action in saying publicly that on this issue his party's policy would not carry the electorate was warmly repudiated in Parliament; yet he would appear to have given a fair enough summary of New Zealand opinion at that time.

The significance of the incident lay in the contrast between the objectivity of Nash's statement with its emphasis on New Zealand's interest in maintaining world peace, and the fiery denunciation of **Holland**; and Nash's voice was that of the future. Opinion even in the leadership of the Labour Party was facing the notion that force as well as good will may be necessary for the control of war-makers.

It was, however, the **League of Nations** that was to provide the machinery for Labour's reconciliation to the principle of the just war. The League in the early days was criticised by Labour spokesmen as being a mere continuation of the wartime alliance, but it soon became apparent that the avowed objectives and methods of

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 221, p. 788.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, Vol. 20, pp. 913–14.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Condliffe, *Problems of the Pacific* (1927), p. 38; *NZ Worker*, Aug-Nov 1927, summarised by Brown, op. cit., p. 175.

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the League lay close to the ideals of those members of the Labour Party who were interested in foreign affairs. The League and its agencies, including the International Labour Organisation, at least offered machinery to those who wished to promote peace and social welfare through international action. It provided a forum in which New Zealand could speak and act for herself, not necessarily echoing the ideas of the **United Kingdom**. It stood for principles of justice, open diplomacy, and the marshalling of law-abiding nations against aggression.

The League, in short, was believed by influential Labour men to stand in the international field for the same principles as their own party, and to hold particular promise for small nations. From 1922 onwards, therefore, Labour spokesmen continually reminded opinion of a fact as yet hazily grasped: namely that the League existed and was potentially important for New Zealand. In 1922 **Holland** and Fraser criticised the Government for committing the country 'without the authority of the parliament and people of New Zealand', and urged that the issues between the Allies and **Turkey** should be submitted to the League for settlement. <sup>1</sup> In 1926 **Holland** complained that the Government had not exercised its right to send an independent delegation to the conference of the International Labour Organisation, thereby depriving the workers of their just rights. In the following year the Labour Party and especially **Holland**, in their opposition to the Government's decision to contribute towards the **Singapore** base, argued that such expenditure was 'contrary to the whole spirit of the **League of Nations**. Instead of using this country's money in increasing the distrust of the West' in the eyes of the East, 'the government should use it in promoting the principles of the **League of Nations** <sup>2</sup>.' In 1933 **Holland** unsuccessfully suggested that Parliament should expressly support the League's attitude in **Manchuria**, <sup>3</sup> and from time to time a plea was entered for New Zealand to take a really positive attitude in League matters. In the debate preceding the Imperial Conference of 1930, for example, Nash claimed that 'The **League of Nations** has accomplished more progressive work and its achievements are greater than any other organisation in the history of the world'. And he asked that the Prime Minister should speak up in the conference to support the League's work, 'not merely to say in a superficial way that the League is a splendid body, but by asserting that the whole weight of the New Zealand government and of our people is behind it in its efforts to establish peaceful relationships between the nations <sup>4</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 197, pp. 86, 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Press*, 2 May 1927.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 235, p. 770.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 225, p. 117.

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Such a statement, if Forbes had been foolish enough to make it, would have been a gross exaggeration, as it indeed would have been if made by the representative of almost any country represented at Geneva. As was to be expected, there was little response to such demands for positive action in support of the League. Yet in a sense Labour's campaign was fought without an enemy. Despite Massey's early suspicions of the League, most conservatives were prepared to admit that it was, in principle, an excellent institution. If there was little enthusiasm for it, there was still less hostility. It is true that in the depth of the depression New Zealand asked for a reduction of her contribution on the ground that the League had made such poor progress; <sup>1</sup> but a cut in her contribution towards naval defence was also suggested in the same year. <sup>2</sup> The attitude of most New Zealanders was not unfriendly. In 1927 Mr Coates, then Prime Minister, summarised it fairly enough in terms characteristically inclined towards the future rather than the past:

We should work quietly and definitely in the direction of helping the **League of Nations** to accomplish what it will accomplish if given time. In the meantime no one can say that the **League of Nations** is an effective protection against aggression or against interference with trade or indeed with peoples, and it is essential in our own interests that we should do our share towards protecting our trade routes and assisting Empire defence. <sup>3</sup>

This statement may accordingly be taken as a reasonable interpretation of New Zealand's official position up to the Italian-Ethiopian crisis. Yet the demand for something more positive was



quietly accumulating. In 1934, for example, Walter Nash inaugurated a debate on the general theme that the Government had not been sufficiently interested in the **League of Nations**. In his view, by this time the League had firmly linked aspects as both an instrument of collective security and as a means of mutual help in raising standards of life. <sup>4</sup> In the balance between the views expressed by Coates and Nash is to be found a summary of effective New Zealand opinion in the first half of the nineteen-thirties.

A vital reservation must here be made from the perspective of twenty years later. The evolution which drew together the attitudes of these two men in relation to external affairs may be plain enough; and its natural culmination was their active collaboration in the War Cabinet. Yet this evolution tended to part both men from a significant section of their followers. As was well known even in 1934, Coates was too radical for many of his own party, which early in the war altered its leadership to his detriment. On

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 233, p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, No. 83, June 1931, p. 708.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 214, pp. 258–9

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 239, p. 7.

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the other hand, Nash in his association of collective security (with its implication of a possible 'just war') with Labour's long-term welfare objective only partially represented the radical currents of the period between the wars. The way was being prepared, therefore, for a new political balance, and an altered relationship between currents of opinion and political spokesmen. Meantime, the growing strength and the debating power of the Labour Party were in part the reflection and in part the cause of a long-term change in the New Zealand community.



What was said and done in the following ten or twelve years cannot be understood unless it be remembered that in New Zealand between 1920 and 1935 men who could command a hearing were saying unorthodox things: that war had been in the past an almost unmitigated evil; that the **League of Nations** should be radically reformed in a democratic sense and used as an instrument for social welfare; that such a League was the highest expression of democratic ideals; that **Britain** herself might in fact be wrong; that New Zealand's people should decide their destiny according to their own judgment; and that New Zealand's policy must be guided by issues arising in the **Pacific** as well as in **Europe**. Such notions might not represent a coherent policy and might be hopelessly remote from practical politics, but they, as well as the continuing reality of the country's dependence on **Britain**, helped to determine the way in which New Zealand behaved when she was forced to define her attitude to the approach of another war.

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 4 – THE CRITICAL YEAR

## CHAPTER 4

### *The Critical Year*

**THE critical year in the definition of New Zealand policy was 1935; for by a combination of external incidents and domestic discussion the character of public opinion was thoroughly tested and almost every group of political importance indicated its attitude either positively or by keeping silent. Accordingly, when the government which held power throughout the war period took office in November, its field of work was defined and its liberty of action circumscribed by facts made plain and pledges given. Moreover, the vigour of debate on domestic issues obscured a fact of first-class importance for external policy. Ostensibly the election of November displaced a government whose views on overseas relations were strictly conventional by one whose leading members had been for years outspoken critics, on varying grounds, of established tradition. Yet the passage of years had softened the asperities of difference between the two parties to such an extent that the Labour leaders were in fact consulted on the critical decision to enforce sanctions against *Italy*. In spite of differences in the past, and in the present a considerable contrast in paths travelled and arguments advanced, the National and Labour parties evidently proposed to do in practice very similar things. The events of 1935, in short, showed with force that New Zealand would face the external crisis with an agreed policy: a fact which helped to keep foreign affairs in their place of accustomed obscurity during a briskly fought general election.**

**The story begins on 19 February when the Prime Minister, G. W. Forbes, made in Parliament a long statement on external affairs: in itself an unusual course which he justified on the ground that members should know the current issues when ‘the times call for the efforts of all well disposed people, and perhaps the weight even of New Zealand might conceivably turn an evenly balanced scale <sup>1</sup>.’ One of the major developments which he then reported to the House was a proposed treaty of non-aggression and mutual protection. The Dominions, he said, were not parties to this new proposal, just as they were not parties to the**

<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 241, p. 79.

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yet it concerned them vitally. 'There must be no blinking the fact that if Great Britain became involved in war New Zealand would also be involved. This is so, not only because of the legal position as we accept it in New Zealand—though there is some difference of opinion on this matter in certain other dominions—it is so because the sentiment of this country would inevitably insist on New Zealand standing shoulder to shoulder with Great Britain in such circumstances: and, even were these two reasons absent, any catastrophe that affects Great Britain must inevitably affect New Zealand also, bound up as we are in the welfare of the Old Country <sup>1</sup>.'

This statement apparently aroused little interest, but two months later the press reported Mr Forbes as having been even more explicit. He was on his way to a conference in **London**, and told the Canadians that he saw no need for discussion on defence or foreign policy. New Zealand had been kept informed of negotiations, but 'when **Britain** is at war, we are at war,' he said. No discussion had taken place in New Zealand as to participation or non-participation in a future war involving the Empire, which was the greatest agency for peace in the world. New Zealanders were confident **Britain** would always be on the side of peace and would make no commitments which were not absolutely necessary.

'We don't have to discuss those things,' he said. If another war broke out he expected New Zealand would act as promptly as in 1914, and there would be no necessity for calling Parliament to decide what should be done. <sup>2</sup>

In substance this reported statement did not add much to what he said in Parliament in February, but it raised a storm throughout the Dominion. There was a spate of newspaper controversy, and even staunchly conservative journals gently chided Forbes's complacency. <sup>3</sup>

**An important declaration was also made at an early stage by M. J. Savage, now Leader of the Labour Party and of the Opposition. In his view Forbes's 'astonishing statement' showed how far the Prime Minister was out of touch with the thinking people of the Dominion. 'Our future,' said Savage, <sup>4</sup> 'is bound up with the countries of the British Commonwealth. The Labour Party will strengthen the ties of the nations of the Commonwealth. The Labour Party's policy in the present state of world thought is to take whatever steps are necessary to defend the Dominion and its democratic institutions, but this policy, to be successful, implies discussion, negotiation and agreement in which Parliament, as representative of the people, should have the determining voice.**

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 241, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 26 Apr 1935.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Apr 1935.

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**The future of the Dominion and the British Commonwealth is dependent on the will to peace. This will can be rendered wholly ineffective if unknown commitments involving the lives of our people are to be made exclusively at the will of men who may not in any way understand the objective and outlook of our people. Our youth should not be sacrificed for unknown causes and unknown policies and without reference to the representatives of the people.'**

**This statement, taken in conjunction with that of Mr Forbes, gives the essence of New Zealand's attitude at this time. Solidarity with fellow members of the Commonwealth was common ground: so was the need for the defence of democracy. The main reminder of Labour's 'free lance' period was insistence that discussion and agreement in the community**

and endorsement by Parliament should precede commitments. There was no hint of pacifism and only a faint echo of the notion that war is necessarily an imperialist swindle. It was fairly clear that if Savage became prime minister, with Fraser and Nash as lieutenants, there would be some vigorous support of the **League of Nations**, the International Labour Organisation and the principles of collective security. There would be a claim for New Zealand to formulate her own foreign policy and even an attempt to associate Parliament and people with such a policy.

This would be done, however, in the faith that it involved no breach with other members of the Commonwealth, but on the contrary was an expression of **Britain's** own ideals. In the nineteen-thirties this faith had some practical justification, for New Zealand Labour could fairly claim that its views were shared, if not by His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, at least by His Majesty's Opposition, together with a large number of politicians and citizens who, on other issues, supported the Government. Further, even though British policy should remain conservative, there was so strong a disposition towards Commonwealth cooperation in the highest levels of the Labour Party that it was, to say the least, doubtful whether an incoming Labour government would push its disagreement beyond the point of frank discussion.

Such was the upshot of discussion on general principles in the first half of 1935; and it was shortly afterwards confirmed by the impact on New Zealand of the Italian-Abyssinian dispute and the problem of sanctions. Here were urgent practical issues formulated in such a way that they could not be indefinitely ignored. Reluctant New Zealand politicians were forced out of silence into speech and had to take up some position, however sketchily defined, towards an international problem of the first magnitude.

From September 1934 onwards the Dominions Office sent to **Wellington** massive information about the developing crisis. It neither asked for nor received any comment, nor did the **New Zealand**

**Government** make any announcement of policy or give a lead to public opinion. This quiescence was deliberate, and was maintained in the face of challenge. On 5 August 1935 a deputation from the **League of Nations** Union asked expressly that the Government should form and announce its policy and suggested strongly that this policy should be the honouring of New Zealand's pledged word and the fulfilment of her obligations under the Covenant. In reply the acting Prime Minister, Sir Alfred Ransom, spoke of New Zealand's love of peace and support of **Britain**, of the dangers of speech and of the difficulty of deciding how far, in fact, the Covenant should be honoured. At this stage the **New Zealand Government** had, in fact, nothing to say.

Meantime, however, Sir James Parr, as High Commissioner in **London**, was attending frequent conferences between the British Foreign Secretary and the Dominion High Commissioners, from which it was hoped that Commonwealth-wide agreement might be reached before the meeting of the League Assembly early in September. On 20 August he wrote asking for instructions. Three days later New Zealand was told what **Britain** proposed to do: to reaffirm loyalty to the League and the procedure laid down in the Covenant; to bring the question of sanctions to the attention of League members and to keep in step with **France**, assuming no obligations which the French would not share. With this document before it the **New Zealand Government** at last formulated its ideas and sent Parr instructions on 2 September. They recorded approval of British policy to date, and promised 'closest collaboration' in the future. New Zealand policy, for publication only if necessary, was to fulfil obligations under the Covenant 'on the understanding that any action to be taken will be collective action as contemplated by the Covenant.' This last saving clause was reinforced in an uneasy confidential note, expressing extreme reluctance to become entangled in any quarrel not directly concerning the British Commonwealth. And as to sanctions, the Government was confident that public opinion would reject any measure involving force, and Parr was told not to vote for any sanction, economic or otherwise, without asking for further instructions.



In short, it took New Zealand a full year and some pressure from overseas to decide a policy, which amounted to following British leadership in reaffirming the Covenant, with conditions, and with the earnest hope that the whole matter might be cleared up without sacrifice. And even this policy was only to be made public if necessity arose, for the Prime Minister expressly declined to make any public statement. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 3 Sep 1935.

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The New Zealand Government trod gingerly on unfamiliar ground, still hopeful that the machinery of the League and of Commonwealth co-operation would rescue it from the need to state its mind publicly. Yet circumstances were forcing it to take part in a debate that was fifteen years old; and before long New Zealand would find itself in unaccustomed opposition to the British viewpoint. This long-standing debate concerned both the original drafting and the interpretation of the provisions of the League Covenant. By Article 10 The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.' Article 16 provided that no member of the League should trade with an aggressor and that the League Council should recommend to each government what contribution it should make 'to the armed forces to be used to protect the Covenant of the League.' These provisions were not regarded by British statesmen as involving, as on the surface they appeared to do, the abandonment of the traditional policy of strictly limited commitments. Article 10 was insisted upon by **France**, who feared she might have to rely on the Covenant for her guarantee against **Germany**, but its second sentence only underlined the circumstances that its first was, as the French delegate complained, 'only a principle'. Sir Alfred Zimmern wrote that '...the fact that the Council was now empowered

only to advise on means of enforcement threw the whole responsibility back from the League upon the individual states, who could justly argue that, in its final form, the article was a mere expression of moral obligation and did not “mean business”. And so those of them for whom the English text of the Covenant is binding have not failed to argue <sup>1</sup>.’

It became quite clear during the twenties that British governments did not consider themselves bound to an automatic and universal guarantee. In Britain, however, as in New Zealand, the League was gaining favour with the left and there is noticeable a swing of opinion in favour of sanctions after the failure to impose them against **Japan's** Manchurian aggression. This feeling found spectacular expression in the Peace Ballot held in **Britain** at the end of 1934. Here, after a series of questions in which voters were given an opportunity to endorse the general principle of the League and disarmament, they were asked: ‘Do you consider that if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by: ( a) economic and non-military measures,

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<sup>1</sup> Zimmern, *League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, pp. 246–7.

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( b) if necessary military measures?’ Out of the eleven and a half million votes cast, ten million replied ‘yes’ to the first half of the question and six million eight hundred thousand to the second half. <sup>1</sup>

The Peace Ballot had been set under way well before the Abyssinian crisis became threatening and its results were announced in June 1935, two months after the **Stresa** conference at which Mussolini had been given some reason to believe that he would get a free hand in **Abyssinia** in exchange for his assistance in holding **Hitler** in check in **Europe**. <sup>2</sup> This unexpectedly emphatic expression of public opinion in the Peace Ballot was followed by an almost equally impressive series of declarations by influential individuals and organisations in favour of the application of the principles of collective security in the developing

crisis. Among these, though too late to influence the British Government's decision, were resolutions in favour of 'all necessary measures' to enforce the Covenant passed by overwhelming majorities at the conference of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party. The last named was followed by the resignation of the pacifist leader of the party, George Lansbury.

The British Government was obviously impressed by the facility with which 'pacifist' opinion could transform itself into support for a League war and therefore accept the necessity for armaments. Baldwin and others had in fact long been convinced that rearmament was necessary in the national interest but that it would be politically dangerous to say so. Here there appeared to be a release from the dilemma. The formula of 'collective security' seemed to cover alike Baldwin's earnest wish for a brisk rearmament programme (which must not, however, outrun political expediency) and the active remnants of nation-wide anti-war sentiment. <sup>3</sup> At the very time when the imminence of public discussion at Geneva made it essential for New Zealand's spokesmen to say at least a few words about the Dominion's attitude, there was a powerful swing in British opinion towards the sterner interpretation of the Covenant's obligations. The British Government harkened. It determined on firm action—or at least firm words—which repudiated the politic silence recently maintained at **Stresa** and cast an odd light on Baldwin's own dictum that effective sanctions mean war. <sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, on 11 September Sir Samuel Hoare declared at Geneva that **Britain** would fulfil her explicit obligations 'for the

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<sup>1</sup> Livingstone, *The Peace Ballot*.

<sup>2</sup> See Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. I, pp. 104–5; Salvemini, *Prelude to World War II*, Ch. XXIII; Cecil, *A Great Experiment*, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> G. M. Young, *Baldwin*, *passim*. Cf. Cecil, *A Great*

<sup>4</sup> *Round Table*, Vol. 25, p. 466; Carter, *British Commonwealth and International Security*, p. 178; Cecil, *A Great Experiment*, p. 260; Young, *Baldwin*.

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collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression.' It was a strong statement, all the more impressive because the League had waited for a decisive lead from the great powers. 'Never did our name stand higher in **Europe** than at the close of that day. It seemed as if England had learnt to speak once more with the voice of Palmerston, or Pitt, or Cromwell <sup>1</sup>.' Parr noted that hesitations seemed to have been swept away, and that when his turn came he should endorse the British view and express 'our loyalty to collective security, a course now being followed by all here, and from which New Zealand cannot stand aloof.' This he did in company with the representatives of other small powers on 14 September, adding the significant remark that, if collective security failed, the small powers would suffer most. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, in New Zealand the Prime Minister broke silence to say that the Dominion had accepted obligations under the Covenant and that New Zealand, being British, would not like its government to dishonour them. 'We feel that the **League of Nations** is the hope of the future and that its testing time has come. We are not going to shirk our obligations <sup>3</sup>.'

Mr Forbes had in his office, if not in his head, full information about the secret negotiations which underlay the brave words at Geneva. Maybe he felt that New Zealand's obligations might not turn out to be very onerous after all, <sup>4</sup> and that the old formula of supporting **Britain** had again shown its utility. Nevertheless, the political currents of 1935 had carried a Conservative government into unfamiliar waters, and brought it into close agreement with the official opposition. When Sir Samuel Hoare spoke at Geneva on 11 September, indeed, it was not quite certain what the **New Zealand Labour Party** would do. In neighbouring

**Australia** opinion was divided, and in the Australian Labour movement the current of isolationism ran strongly. Moreover, during the Address-in-Reply debate, when the Prime Minister invited members to express their opinions, no clear consensus—nor indeed strong feeling—emerged from the Labour benches between 6 and 12 September. At the same time it seems that discussions were held by representatives of the industrial and political wings of the movement, and at least one observer expected Labour to follow an Australian lead against

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<sup>1</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, p. 210. The sympathy of ‘practically the whole of the world’, Savage later remarked, had rallied behind the magnificent lead given by Hoare.—Imperial Conference, 1937, 3rd meeting.

<sup>2</sup> Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 20 Sep 1935; quoted Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>4</sup> For those who feared precipitate action, the attitude of the French was a safeguard. On the evening of the 11th Laval congratulated Hoare on his speech, while regretting that **Britain** had not spoken thus in earlier years ‘when **France** was more directly engaged.’

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participation in overseas war. <sup>1</sup> There was then a background of some uncertainty on this issue when on 16 September Walter Nash, now National President of the party, addressed Labour's first big meeting in the general election campaign. ‘The Labour Party,’ he said, ‘is solidly behind the idea of collective security. This can best be achieved through adherence to the Covenant of the **League of Nations**.’ The covenant, he said, provided for peaceful change, and also, if all fulfilled their obligations, for the defeat of aggression. The Italians, he admitted, might insist on war: if this happened and if ‘the British Empire was drawn into it, New Zealanders should not be led into it with emotional hatred and shouting, but should fight in sorrow for the good of the

future <sup>2</sup>.’

Mr Nash offered a clear answer to a decisive question: would the Opposition, on the eve of a general election, follow the Government in its ostensibly firm advocacy of League action? His robust affirmative was indeed challenged within the Labour movement by dissident individuals and by certain unions on the ground that the existing crisis was merely capitalism at its old tricks of bluffing the workers to slaughter each other for Imperialists' profits: ‘the situation does not differ fundamentally from that of 1914, and we refuse to be again deceived’ resolved the Seamen's Union immediately after the Italians invaded **Abyssinia**. <sup>3</sup> This line of criticism, however, apparently failed to deflect the party's leadership, and on 16 October the party's official organ, the *Standard*, editorially approved of the principle of collective security. The members of the League must fulfil their obligations, it said, and ‘it is useless to cloud the issue with arguments about imperialism.’ The acquiescence of the **New Zealand Labour Party** in Nash's policy speech of 16 September 1935 was a critical point in New Zealand foreign policy. It meant that after the election of that year a prosanctionist policy, into which a conservative government had drifted slowly and reluctantly, was to be taken over by a Labour cabinet which really believed in it, and which had won the preliminary skirmish against its own dissidents. The Labour movement in New Zealand, as in **Britain**, had grasped the nettle of warfare as the ultimate guarantee of collective security.

Accordingly, the enforcement of sanctions as advocated by **Britain** and **France** was for New Zealand an agreed policy. At Geneva the Government proceeded slowly and apprehensively, striving anxiously and unsuccessfully to keep precisely in step with the **United Kingdom**. In New Zealand it took the Labour Party into its confidence. The leaders of the party saw and discussed the

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<sup>1</sup> *Tomorrow*, 18 Sep 1935.

<sup>2</sup> *NZ Worker*, 25 Sep 1935.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 5 Oct 1935; *Tomorrow* 9 Oct 1935

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confidential correspondence; while caucus had an advance copy of the bill embodying the Government's policy, and apparently was successful in having a proviso added to safeguard free speech and prevent the regulations authorised by the new legislation from enforcing conscription. In these negotiations, the Government explained, its hope was to enable the country to speak with one voice on an issue of great importance which was not a party matter; and it was, broadly speaking, successful. The Bill to enable the Government to enforce sanctions was passed without a division and without Labour opposition on 23 October. And incidentally, the defence estimates also passed without Labour opposition on 3 October, in sharp contrast with the course of events in 1934.

Parliamentary unanimity was, of course, a deceptive index to public opinion, for to the last the community as a whole showed little interest in foreign affairs as a field for New Zealand initiative. It was observant and receptive, but unconscious of responsibility. Moreover, no government had made any effort to educate opinion to a contrary point of view, and the earlier stages of this very crisis passed according to the usual pattern with the Government assuming a policy only when forced to do so by outside events. Nevertheless, the fact that it ultimately did something, and even did something with a form of independence, was a gratification not only to nascent national sentiment and to an important section of the Labour movement, but to influential people in the government camp. In April, for instance, a daily paper so far removed from Labour sympathies as the *Evening Post*<sup>1</sup> gently reminded the Prime Minister that his great confidence in the British Government did not divest him of responsibility for positive action in imperial statesmanship, and in September boldly chided the Government for leaving the public without a lead. In the same month the Christ-church



**Press accused cabinet of lethargic indifference in foreign affairs' and said that it was 'wrong and dangerous for members of the New Zealand government to assume that the willingness of the British government to advise and assist absolves them from duty to think.' The public, added that newspaper, was fortunately showing signs of 'a more active intelligence'. The Prime Minister was stung into protest by this criticism, but the editor stuck to his guns in private correspondence. Finally, it may be noted that in June 1935 the annual conference of the Returned Soldiers' Association discussed the overlapping fields of defence and foreign policy. It sent forward for consideration a plan by which the members of the Commonwealth should pool their resources, military and economic, and invite peace-loving countries of western **Europe** to join in a**

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 26 Apr 1935.

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**tight system of collective security within the League but explicitly abandoning the universal guarantee. <sup>1</sup>**

**In short, by the end of 1935 not only was the Labour Party converted, but the forces of orthodoxy were in considerable measure adjusted to the notion that New Zealand should actively participate in sanctions; and the form of the crisis disarmed the strongest of the pacifist elements in the country. The **League of Nations** Union, for example, had prominent pacifist supporters. It was a small body in any case, though not unrepresentative; and it was naturally pro-Covenant, which in this context meant sanctionist. Again, in 1933 and 1934 the No More War Movement, the Councils against War in various centres, and the Movement Against War and Fascism contained strongly pacifist elements. In the last year before the crisis the last-named was probably the most influential of these movements. Like much anti-war activity during these years, it owed a good deal to the work of the small Communist party, though it was supported by many pacifically minded non-communists, and in the main its propaganda followed the general**



Communist party line. Up to September 1935 this was to denounce both the Italian and British governments and to approve any efforts to stop the Italians save those led by **Britain**. In September, however, the Soviet Union approved Sir Samuel Hoare's pro-Covenant speech, and by the end of the month the *Workers' Weekly* said plainly that 'all those who stand for peace' must 'support the Soviet Union in the demand that sanctions be enforced against **Italy** <sup>2</sup>.' This statement aligned the foreign policy of the Communist party with that of the British and New Zealand governments and with the British and New Zealand Labour parties, and it destroyed the Movement against War and Fascism, which at one time had seemed a possible instrument for the articulation of pacifist and anti-sanctionist sentiment.

There remained, indeed, a significant number of unappeased Christian Pacifists, who asserted boldly the view that 'participation in war is a denial of the spirit and teaching of Christ'; 'that attempts to end war by means of war will defeat their own ends, and that ultimately the only way to create a warless world is by taking the risks and making the sacrifices involved in an absolute repudiation of war <sup>3</sup>.' A deputation went so far as to tell the Prime Minister that in a new war 'no government could reckon on the unanimity which manifested itself in 1914', and forecast resistance to conscription by any moral means. <sup>4</sup> Another group insisted that

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, September 1935, p. 858.

<sup>2</sup> *Workers' Weekly*, 28 Sep 1935.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 7 Sep 1935; *Press*, 30 Sep 1935.

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Post*, 18 Sep 1935.

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membership of the Christian Church 'sets definite limits to our obedience to the behests of the State' and that the duty of obedience

**stopped short of co-operation in war-making. <sup>1</sup>**

**Ministers and laymen who held such views were to be found in all the main Protestant denominations, and earnest discussion took place. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, for example, considered in November a pacifist resolution, but in the end unanimously approved of economic sanctions, and its Moderator said expressly that for the church 'sometimes war was the least of a number of conflicting evils <sup>2</sup>.' In the previous February the Methodist Conference called on everyone to consider his or her attitude towards war, and recognised that personal judgments might differ. 'We uphold liberty of conscience in whichever direction loyalty to inward convictions may lead them <sup>3</sup>.' Nevertheless, it seems fair to conclude that pacifist sentiment of an absolute character which rejected a sanctionist policy was confined to a comparatively small though active minority. The existence of this minority together with criticisms voiced by the Seamen's Union in the Labour movement showed a healthy variety in opinion but did not modify the general conclusion. A clear-cut and deliberate parliamentary decision had, when it came to the point, been accepted with equanimity by the majority of those who might have been expected to oppose it. The principle of economic sanctions as expressed in the legislation of 23 October represented the policy more or less consciously accepted by the vast majority of New Zealanders.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 7 Sep 1935.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 28 Sep 1935.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Feb 1935, 21 Sep 1935.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 5 – IMPACT OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT

## CHAPTER 5

### *Impact of a Labour Government*

**THE** critical decision on sanctions made—and accepted—Parliament was dissolved on 26 October, and the general election could be fought, according to custom, on purely domestic issues. <sup>1</sup> Neither party's manifesto referred to **Abyssinia**, and there was no incompatibility in their brief references to foreign policy. The Labour Party stressed international co-operation with economic objectives as well as political, while the Nationalists registered support of the League and its principles, but stressed 'cordial collaboration' with the **United Kingdom**. Candidates' speeches, corresponding to the electorate's predominant interests, concentrated on domestic economic policy and the promotion of secure prosperity. New Zealand voted with its mind full of the depression and wage cuts, the price of butterfat, and the possibility of 'orderly marketing'. Labour's overwhelming victory of 27 November had nothing to do with foreign affairs.

The election campaign of 1935 would, indeed, have followed the same course and its results would have been the same if the knot of Labour leaders had been persistent isolationists and if Mussolini had postponed his Ethiopian adventure by twelve months. Nevertheless, new hands did in fact now grasp the helm, with results that were promptly made clear to the British Government. On 8 December the so-called Hoare-Laval proposals to end the Italian-Abyssinian conflict were drafted in **Paris**. According to Sir James Parr, who was shown the draft as High Commissioner, they would have handed over half of Ethiopia to the Italians; and they showed that the sanctionist policy into which New Zealand had followed the British Government was not to be taken quite at its face value. 'The Prime Minister had declared that Sanctions meant war; secondly he was resolved there must be no war; and thirdly he decided upon Sanctions <sup>2</sup>.' But the principles of the Peace Ballot which had provoked the Baldwin Government into its brief and unhappy effort at a virtuoso performance were taken much more seriously by the **New Zealand Government** as well as by a most

<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, December 1935, pp. 202 ff.; March 1936, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

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powerful body of opinion in **Britain**. On 13 December New Zealand advised the British Government that it could not associate itself with the proposals: a gesture whose significance was temporarily masked by the immediate and overwhelming reaction in **Britain** itself. Public opinion clearly regarded the Hoare-Laval plan as a betrayal of Ethiopia and a repudiation both of the Baldwin Government's election promises and of the policy to which it had firmly pledged itself for three critical months. Mr Baldwin promptly confessed his mistake, sacrificed his Foreign Secretary and told the world that 'the proposals are absolutely and completely dead'. The United Kingdom accordingly returned, somewhat chastened, to the policy for which it had won general approval throughout the Commonwealth in September: sanctions, short of anything which would provoke war.

There is no suggestion that New Zealand pushed her pro-League policy to extremes; to the extent, for example, of actively supporting the tentative moves at Geneva towards enforcing the oil sanction against **Italy**. Even the fact of her warm protest against the Hoare-Laval proposals was kept secret. Nevertheless, it was clear that just as Massey and Ward had been impelled to speak up in defence of 'imperial interests' when Labour had been in power in **Britain**, so the Labour Government in New Zealand had the feeling that the principles of collective security were taken far too lightly by British conservatism. Moreover, though their novelty has been overstressed, these protests were made more systematically and before long more publicly than ever before. Indeed, it seemed for a season that on all the big issues raised at Geneva, from **Spain** and **China** and from the Italian conquest of **Abyssinia** to the problem of reforming the League itself, New Zealand's policy expressly diverged from that of the **United Kingdom**.

In the first half of 1936 the **New Zealand Government** wanted sanctions to be maintained and even intensified, because their removal condoned a breach of the Covenant. In July, while acquiescing perforce in the abandonment of sanctions, it did this on the condition—also stressed at that time by the **United Kingdom**—that the whole Geneva peace structure should be reviewed at the September meeting of the Assembly. Following this line of thought the Assembly itself in July asked member governments to report by 1 September any improvements they would like to see made in the Covenant. This invitation led to a clear difference of opinion between the British and New Zealand governments. **Britain**, uncertain as to its own policy and desiring Commonwealth unanimity, suggested that no concrete reply should be made until the Assembly had met and other countries had shown their hands. New Zealand, alone among Commonwealth countries, firmly rejected **Britain's** advice and submitted a detailed reply to Geneva by the date set. Further, this memorandum expressed strong and clear-cut opinions which were not in line with British policy.

The fault, argued the **New Zealand Government**, lay not in the Covenant but in its enforcement, which should be made automatic and overwhelming. New Zealand for her part declared that she would take her part in sanctions, including complete economic boycott and the application of force against an aggressor, and that she would agree to an international force under the control of the League. To these simple and forthright views the memorandum added some characteristic suggestions in detail. Such a scheme would work only if governments had behind them the declared approval of their peoples: therefore it was suggested that League proceedings should be broadcast, and that all peoples in the world should be asked to declare in national plebiscites whether or not they would join in full and automatic sanctions. Though New Zealand did not herself favour regional pacts she was prepared, if a universal system could not be established, to support a scheme by which only the non-military sanctions should be universally applied, and certain countries might confine their duty to use force to troubles within a given area. Again, there should be adequate 'machinery for the

ventilation and if possible rectification of international grievances'; the problem of revising the peace treaties should be cautiously, but broad-mindedly, approached; world-wide survey of economic conditions should be undertaken; and non-members of the League as well as members should if possible be brought into the discussion on this or any other scheme for collective security. <sup>1</sup>

This memorandum was a declaration of faith by the new government. It was backed on the one hand by a declared willingness to progress gradually and to consider alternative means of achieving the distant goal of world-wide orderliness, and on the other hand by practical acts of policy. To the end, New Zealand put at Geneva the case for the maintenance of sanctions, though she recognised the impropriety of a country so small and so far removed from physical danger or the risk of serious economic loss pushing too hard against a majority. <sup>2</sup> With the Italians firmly established in **Addis Ababa**, she resisted to the end the suggestion that their conquest should be recognised. The British Government was impressed by the need to re-establish good relations with **Italy** and by the danger of strengthening the understanding between Rome and **Berlin**. In the phrase of Lord Halifax, those who were unwilling

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<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary New Zealand*, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Parr to Assembly in July, *Otago Daily Times*, 5 Jul 1936.

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to drive the Italians from Ethiopia by force must one day acknowledge their presence there: the timing of recognition thus became a matter of 'political judgment and not part of the eternal and immutable moralities <sup>1</sup>.' The New Zealand Government firmly refused, however, to 'support any proposal which would involve either directly or by implication, approval of a breach of the Covenant.' 'They cannot convince themselves that right and justice are to be achieved by any departure from the principles of the Covenant <sup>2</sup>.'



The same questions were raised by the war in **Spain**. On this issue her position was indeed difficult. On the one hand the **United Kingdom** was, of all British countries, most closely associated with **Spain** by geography, history, and economic interest; and the risk of attack in any general war originating in **Spain** was hers. Further, the crisis arose in mid-1936, at a time when the British Government was most anxious to rebuild friendly relations with **Italy**, and when the undeniable Italian victory in **Abyssinia** seemed to have opened a certain chance to let bygones be bygones. Yet, to many New Zealanders as to many Englishmen, the Spanish government seemed to stand broadly for the humane and liberal and democratic principles shared by the British and New Zealand Labour movements, while, to many, the rebel generals stood, among other things, for social reaction and the authoritarian state. Further, the conviction grew in 1936 and 1937 that an allegedly civil war was in substance an international one, in which the Italian and German governments were openly backing the elements in **Spain** like-minded with themselves, while Spaniards of the contrary opinion benefited only from the enthusiasms of private individuals; for reports of Russian aid were discounted. Finally, as the horrors of warfare developed and became known, it shocked the humanitarian government in **Wellington** and its warm-hearted spokesman at Geneva that the civilised world could find no remedy for such a breakdown in international decencies. On the face of it the Spanish civil war challenged the basic principles of Labour thinking: faith in democracy, in the decency of ordinary men, and in the ultimate validity of reason over force. The war, after all, originated in a military rebellion, it was waged to a significant extent by foreign soldiers and technicians on Spanish soil, and it let loose savagery in **Europe**. Some had argued, for example, that the war in **Abyssinia** was a colonial crisis and that the **Far East** was a problem with its own character which was still comparatively distant in mind as well as in space. But Spain by any reckoning lay in the heart of **Europe**. Its tragedy was enacted under the eyes of the

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Council meeting, 12 May 1938.

West, and with results that must affect men's attitudes as well as the balance of forces.

In these circumstances divergences of opinion were almost inevitable between a Conservative government in **Britain** and a Labour government in New Zealand; and these divergences were given unusual publicity because both governments held seats on the Council of the **League of Nations**. The United Kingdom had a permanent seat as a great power, and New Zealand was elected to one of the temporary seats in 1936: this was taken in New Zealand as a tribute to the activity in international affairs of the new Labour government and to the impression made among the smaller powers by New Zealand's vigorous championing of the principles of the Covenant. When, therefore, the Spanish government appealed to the League, both **Britain** and New Zealand had to explain themselves in public. The result was a difference in approach even more marked than the difference in action contemplated. Mr W. J. Jordan on behalf of New Zealand spoke with the warmth of a convinced democrat and humanitarian who could not feel that 'non-intervention' was the only solution civilisation could offer to suffering **Spain**. If there were two sides, he argued, let both be stated to the Council and let the Council pronounce between them. Alternatively, let some outside body establish order, and when the storm was calmed, allow the Spanish people to decide their own fate. On the one hand, reason could surely find a way, if its voice were once effectively heard through third-party judgment: on the other, the people expressing their will democratically must be able to find a solution. Better reason than guns: force alone cannot create peace or make a government legitimate.

Here was the expression of a faith which lay at the heart of New Zealand domestic politics as of British. But Britain, unlike New Zealand, had for centuries been involved in the maze of European diplomacy. On this issue she trod the tortuous and unhappy path of 'realism': well

intentioned, but in caution even outdoing the French. At Geneva, therefore, British and New Zealand delegates spoke with a differing accent, and there was one incident greedily seized upon by journalists, when the British Foreign Secretary was seen to confer with Mr Jordan just before the latter spoke. There is, in fact, no substantial reason to believe that anything was 'blue pencilled' at Eden's behest, but the story underlines the admitted difference in viewpoint between the two governments, as well, incidentally, as the close contact maintained. Meanwhile, in the ordinary routine of Commonwealth consultation New Zealand remained 'unalterably opposed to any action which, either directly or indirectly could be interpreted as, or tends towards, the recognition of any administration in **Spain** other than that of the lawfully constituted government.' She objected, therefore, in March and in September 1937 to the proposal to exchange agents with **General Franco's** regime and raised objection, too, to suggestions for the grant of belligerent rights. <sup>1</sup> At the Imperial Conference in May 1937, moreover, Mr Savage had frankly denounced the reluctance of such conferences 'to attack and solve difficult problems merely because of their difficulty.' He feared 'an innocuous and unhelpful formula' and said that the 'improvisation and indecision' of recent British policy could not be 'accepted as a sufficient application of the principles of League support accepted as Commonwealth foreign policy.'

In 1936 and 1937 New Zealand was, then, an active champion of the principle of collective security, and urged in Geneva and **London** that loyal application of the Covenant was the world's best hope of escape from the perpetual threat of war. This policy was a good deal criticised at the time and since on two main grounds. There were still some in New Zealand who argued strongly that public divergence from British policy must be avoided at all cost; and there were those, in New Zealand and abroad, who urged that her reputation for pro-League championship was won a little cheaply and at the expense of other countries no less willing to take risks for human well-being. As acknowledged by her spokesmen, New Zealand was in most ways favourably placed during the sanctions crisis and the Spanish civil war. Her economic loss was small and if the

upshot in either case had been a general war, its first impact would have been on nearer and greater powers. Remoteness and inconspicuousness gave opportunities for the assertion of principle and for freedom of action which great powers sometimes complained that they lacked. Similarly, it was argued, a small power in 1936 could make generous offers in support of collective security without great danger of being called upon to honour them, and it could express concern for lifting the living standards of backward people without making notable changes in customs and immigration policy. It was remarked, for example, that New Zealand's energetic participation in international gatherings and the work of the International Labour Organisation did not lead to the immediate ratification of ILO conventions.

Such criticisms were in part justified and in part beside the point. Determination not to compromise with evil or surrender a moral principle was fortified by New Zealand's isolation from disturbing contact with very different sets of moral and political principles, and was evident in New Zealand foreign policy in days well before a Labour government. In the case of the Labour Party, there was

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<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 25 Mar 1937; Jordan to Savage, 16 Jul 1937; GGNZ to SSSA, 30 Sep 1937.

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somewhat incongruously combined with respect for moral principle a confidence in the efficacy of economic remedies to cope with human ills and apparent wickedness. These attitudes were expressed in their most popular form by a prime minister, M. J. Savage, who was an Australian-born Irishman but in his kindness and optimism very typical of New Zealand. His comments on international affairs were not subtle or, for the most part, particularly realistic, and partly for that reason could be both emphatic and representative of his people. His warm faith in the soundness of the common man embraced the whole world. Let economic welfare be promoted, he argued, and the peoples of the world be given the chance to opt for decent behaviour; let us talk frankly, and swamp

the warlords and profiteers in the good will and good sense of mankind. In 1936 he would 'back the peoples of the world 100 per cent to endorse the principles of peace every time they have an opportunity of doing it <sup>1</sup>.' In May 1937 he patiently explained to hard-boiled statesmen in Imperial Conference assembled, that the causes of war were essentially economic, that low standards of life among millions of suffering men promoted hatred and turned trade into a matter of rivalry and tension instead of an obvious common interest of humanity. The conference, he added philosophically, ultimately agreed that it would be a good thing to lift living standards but refused to see the connection between this and war: 'I suppose one cannot blame them <sup>2</sup>.' Well into 1939 he hammered the same idea. 'People do not fight for the love of it. There are underlying causes, and if the representatives of the nations can meet to talk about them there is a chance of removing those causes.... You cannot consider them on the battlefield.' And, he added, 'proper trade relationships' formed the most important single factor. <sup>3</sup>

For the Prime Minister, then, international like domestic policy was a matter of applied good will, and of moral principles which all men readily accept. At the Imperial Conference he pressed for a Commonwealth policy founded on a universally accepted moral basis and apparently felt that there should be little difficulty in pronouncing between right and wrong. The assumption is plain that there is a decency and a rightness in behaviour which will be recognised by all reasonable men of whatever race and colour, and accepted as guides to conduct in international affairs. Rightness and decency would clearly include the redress of legitimate grievances—for example, the over-severe clauses of the Treaty of **Versailles**, against which New Zealand Labour spokesmen had strongly protested; but they would not include the kind of  
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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 245, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Dominion*, 29 Jul 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Post*, 17 Apr 1939.

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which were to lead to the extinction of **Austria** and of **Czechoslovakia**.

Consistent thinking along these lines naturally led to sharp differences over particular issues between the governments of New Zealand and of the **United Kingdom**. Yet there remained a genuine fundamental harmony. When the Labour Party took office the British Prime Minister was Stanley Baldwin, four-fifths of whose formula for democratic statesmanship fits Savage with uncanny accuracy: 'use your commonsense; avoid logic; love your fellow men; have faith in your own people, and grow the hide of a rhinoceros <sup>1</sup>.' Baldwin, moreover, had made it abundantly clear that in war-making, or even in serious preparations for war, he would not move ahead of public opinion: an attitude shared also by Chamberlain and Eden. <sup>2</sup> If the criterion for commitments—let alone war—was plainly acceptability to British opinion, here was ample safeguard for New Zealand. By accepting in 1935 the concept of a sanctionist war the Labour Party had pledged the new regime in advance to accept any commitment which a British government could, in the foreseeable future, confidently present to its own public.

There could be no doubt, then, of the New Zealand Labour Government's acceptance of the Dominion's commitment to **Britain**, and the exercise of her right to vigorous expression of independent judgment carried no implied challenge to the imperial link. In July 1937 Savage, as Prime Minister, gave in homely words much the same interpretation of the situation as had his predecessors. He was rendering to the New Zealand people some account of the recent Imperial Conference, during

which he had sharply criticised some aspects of British policy. 'We did not agree on everything,' he said, 'far from it; but the objective was about the same right along the line, and if **Britain** were in difficulties tomorrow I don't think there would be much division. I think about the same thing would happen as happened last time <sup>3</sup>.' In the following year two key cabinet ministers were even more explicit: 'in one split second after **Britain** becomes involved in war,' said Mark Fagan, <sup>4</sup> 'this country also becomes involved'; and Walter Nash, the Minister of Finance, thus justified a large increase in the defence vote: 'If the old country is attacked we are too. We hate all this war propoganda, but if an attack is made on Great Britain then we will assist her to the fullest extent possible <sup>5</sup>.'

Close collaboration with **Britain** was, in fact, an essential part of Labour's policy, both as announced while in opposition, and as

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<sup>1</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the explicit statement by Eden to first meeting of Imperial Conference, 19 May 1937.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 29 Jul 1937.

<sup>4</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 251, p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> *Round Table*, September 1938, pp. 865–6.

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practised when in power. The change of government brought no slackening of political bonds, but a more vigorous use of co-operative machinery devised in the past under pressure from dominions much more independently minded than New Zealand; and it also established a firm tradition that on most big issues New Zealand had something to say. Viewed from the angle of New Zealand's history, this was no revolution, but merely a change of emphasis. In the context of



Commonwealth policy-making, however, it acquired a considerable if transitory importance. New Zealand's views carried far more weight than derived from her own power because her spokesmen often summed up important minority opinion in other parts of the Commonwealth. The established system of consultation embraced governments only; it proved a marked advantage of that system that in such linked communities, the views of some government so often coincided with those of the opposition elsewhere, or of some unrepresented section of a government party. New Zealand's representatives in Westminster and Geneva spoke for a constituency much wider than the **New Zealand Labour Party**. Her very unorthodox High Commissioner, W. J. Jordan, was regarded as 'truly English' when he quoted the Bible at hard-headed politicians, and cut through the convenient mazes of diplomatic finesse to remind them of the fundamental principles at stake. <sup>1</sup>

At a time when her action had strategic importance, then, New Zealand proceeded to exercise vigorously and with some publicity her acknowledged right as a dominion; and the new scale of activities soon called for improvement, both in **Wellington** and in **London**, in the technique of mutual consultation among British countries. Its life blood was information; and as a matter of routine the Dominions Office sent out to the dominion capitals a flood of confidential documents drawn from the British government's world-wide sources of information. Their physical quantity pre-supposed in the receiving centres a team of experts to read and analyse them for the benefit of politicians. In Wellington there was until 1943 no such organisation. External affairs were handled by the Prime Minister and his scantily manned department. Two or three officials of high ability but unlimited range of responsibility struggled as best they could with the flood of overseas documentation, and had to be prepared to discuss with their political masters any problems arising outside New Zealand as well as within it. This lack of elementary machinery for handling policy matters, which was of course paralleled in most government activities, derived from the days when New Zealand was scarcely

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interested in world politics, and when her views were unimportant. The danger of the situation was averted by accidental circumstances; by the presence in cabinet of an unusual body of relatively well informed interest in external problems; by the harmony of viewpoint between leading civil servants and ministers; and by the exceptional ability and long memories of individuals concerned. The Labour victory brought new men into this particular field, and their energies ensured at least the temporary filling of a serious lack in Commonwealth policy-making: for there was now sustained activity in **Wellington**.

When members of the new cabinet applied themselves with unusual knowledge and energy to the field of external affairs, they were represented in **London** in an unusually intimate way. William Jordan, who was High Commissioner from 1936 to 1951, was a Londoner who had become very typical of New Zealand. He was kind and naïve, with simple rules of conduct, and was resistant to the diplomatic convention that action need not conform too closely to verbal professions or to consistency. Above all, he represented the faith that the world's worst tensions will respond to straightforward human decency and good will. This general viewpoint corresponded closely to that of his Prime Minister, Savage, with whom he kept in close personal touch, and indeed to that of C. A. Berendsen, who could express in cogent and eloquent reasoning views which in Savage and Jordan were warm and vague. Accordingly, the views of average, kindly New Zealanders—which differed little from those of average, kindly Englishmen—were for a season forcibly expressed in the privileged and semi-private circle of Commonwealth consultation as well as on the ready-made platform of Geneva. There is, of course, no reason to suspect that New Zealand's persistent advocacy of fidelity to principle deflected the forces which were thrusting the world into disaster. Yet it had some importance, if only in the embarrassment of diplomats <sup>1</sup> and in a certain encouragement to men of similar impulses in other countries.

Here, as elsewhere, the Labour Government made vigorous use of historic institutions. New Zealand had had a High Commissioner in **London** since 1908 and before him an Agent-General. The High Commissioner's position as an instrument of consultation was not well defined and his office was concerned primarily with the bread and butter side of New Zealand's overseas relations. Nevertheless the appointment was normally held by men of standing in the political hierarchy. Such men could perform a valuable function in conveying to those who sat in **London** the temper and atmosphere of thought in **Wellington**, and continual use was made of their services as contact men. 'Whereas in the past the British Govern-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Walters, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 736.

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settled all matters of moment and informed us after these matters had been settled', wrote Sir Thomas Wilford as High Commissioner in 1930, the volume of regular consultation had then grown so great that 'this office has become the "foreign office" of New Zealand <sup>1</sup>.'

Savage and his colleagues had of course no intention of locating their 'foreign office' outside **Wellington**, yet when they grasped the helm they found the necessary machinery, and much of the necessary tradition, already established in **London**. The main improvement made there was a minor one: the adoption of a device suggested years before by the fertile J. G. Coates, and operated with great apparent success <sup>2</sup> by the Australians from 1924 onwards. A New Zealand liaison officer was appointed in 1937 to work with the British cabinet secretariat, and thus supplement documents and official interviews by the intimacy that can only grow through daily working contact.

The main changes in the machinery of consultation were made at the **Wellington** end. New Zealand had not followed the general

Commonwealth convention of regarding her Governor as the personal representative of the King and of negotiating wholly through other channels with his ministers in the **United Kingdom**. New Zealand's Governor-General remained, therefore, in some sense a representative of the British government, and at least on one important occasion he made an express personal appeal to his New Zealand ministers to bring their policy into line with British wishes. <sup>3</sup> He was the official channel of communication between governments until February 1941 and the cipher staff was in fact lodged at **Government House**; an arrangement which sometimes led to serious delays. <sup>4</sup> The major step in improving this situation was taken early in 1939 when Sir Harry Batterbee took up residence as first British High Commissioner in **Wellington**. Thereafter the Governor-General could wholly cease to represent the British government, though his office handled the formal transmission of inter-government despatches for two years more, and useful new channels of communication were opened up. Despatches intended for the New Zealand government were, in fact, often sent from **London** to the High Commissioner, who with his staff could partially correct the inevitable aridity of cabled correspondence. New Zealand thus at last adopted to its full extent the available machinery for consultation with the **United Kingdom**. As will be

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<sup>1</sup> Wilford to Ward, 14 May 1930.

<sup>2</sup> R. G. Casey, *Conduct of Australian Foreign Policy* (1952), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> In April 1937 when transmitting a despatch dated 26 Apr 1937 dealing with the proposed recognition of Italian sovereignty in **Abyssinia**.

<sup>4</sup> An important **London** cable of 19 Mar 1937 reached **Government House** on the 20th but the Prime Minister's Department not until the 23rd.

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noted, similar expansion in administrative machinery shortly took place in relation to the two neighbouring dominions of **Canada** and **Australia**, and to the **United States**; an expansion accompanied by the establishment in **Wellington** of a properly organised, if still inadequately staffed, **Department of External Affairs** in 1943.

Some small but significant improvements, then, were made in the machinery of co-operation in the early years of the Labour Government. There was, moreover, a new and active insistence that New Zealand wished this machinery to be vigorously used. On specific issues she emphatically and sometimes publicly differed from the views of the British government, and on general principles made her attitude clear at the Imperial Conference of 1937. This conference rather characteristically followed the celebrations of the coronation. It took place behind closed doors and its published documents were masterpieces of platitudinous reticence. Yet its discussions were an important prelude to the final crisis. Not only did they help to strengthen one of the most solid factors in Commonwealth relations, namely personal intimacy among key men, but they made clear the attitudes of these men towards general problems of Commonwealth co-operation, and towards a specific crisis, whose shape was already fairly evident.

In this company New Zealand's main spokesman, M. J. Savage, appeared to be concerned primarily with three things. First, he advocated in unfamiliar company New Zealand's formula of kindness, decency, and economic welfare as an immediate remedy for world tensions. Second, he ardently desired a foreign policy for the Commonwealth as a whole, and evidently felt that agreement could be reached if men of good will would talk honestly and try to keep their conduct in line with their professed principles. Third, however, he said in plain terms that, of recent years, Commonwealth foreign policy had been neither sound nor consistent nor framed in genuine consultation. He warmly acknowledged the admirable stream of information supplied from **London**. But, he added, 'information is one thing; consultation is a

**totally different thing....’ and he complained of recent occasions when British policy had been reversed, ‘without consultation with the Dominions, without one word of warning to the Dominions.’ He confessed himself puzzled by the apparent lack of guiding principle in what had been done. ‘I realise the complexity and difficulty of these questions,’ he said, ‘and we in New Zealand are prepared to go a long way in supporting the principal partner of the Commonwealth in any foreign policy, the general lines of which we have understood and approved beforehand and which is based on principle and not only on expediency. But I consider it essential that an agreed Commonwealth foreign policy should be adopted, that effective means of consultation must be evolved to ensure that this is observed or to provide for agreed alterations <sup>1</sup>.’**

**New Zealand's plea in 1937 echoed that of 1930. The supply of information in itself does not constitute consultation, unless it is supplied in time for considered opinions to be formed and unless it is conveyed in such a manner that comment is made easy even if not directly requested. The British Government was indeed in a dilemma at a time when some dominions claimed an active right to participate, while others rejected participation as possibly carrying commitments. In the upshot, despatches from **London** to New Zealand in 1937 began to include occasional invitations for the expression of dominion opinion. Further, as the crisis intensified, increased use was made of a device already familiar. The Dominion High Commissioners as a group were summoned to frequent conferences—daily at times—with the British Foreign Secretary or the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. During the Italian-Ethiopian dispute, therefore, the **United Kingdom** cabinet, which was necessarily the most active of British Commonwealth governments in the matter, had frequent personal reminders of the existence and importance of dominion viewpoints. The same practice was followed in relation to **Spain**. Whether these meetings and the resulting correspondence between the High Commissioners and their Prime Ministers resulted in dominion viewpoints becoming incorporated in Commonwealth policy is another matter. In a personal report to Savage after one such meeting, Jordan wrote that he had inquired about**

the fate of New Zealand's suggestions without receiving encouragement. He had then asked bluntly whether he and his colleagues were there to be consulted, and had been informed with equal bluntness that they 'were not being consulted but were being informed <sup>2</sup>.'

Nevertheless it seems clear that by the outbreak of war the means were ready to hand for men who had worked together over a period of years to learn and sympathise with each other's attitudes, and even to frame and operate a common policy. Whether all this machinery was fully used, and whether it did in fact lead the British Commonwealth into action which had genuinely been jointly planned, is of course another matter. In 1944 Lord Halifax, who had been Foreign Secretary in 1939, set out powerfully the case for the negative. 'On September 3, 1939,' he said, 'the Dominions were faced with a dilemma. Either they must confirm the policy which they had only a partial share in framing, or they must stand aside and see the unity of the Commonwealth broken, perhaps fatally and forever.... That is the point at which equality

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<sup>1</sup> Imperial Conference, 3rd meeting, 21 May 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan to Savage, 16 Jul 1937.

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of function lags behind equality of status. The Dominions are free—absolutely free—to choose their path; but every time there is a crisis in international affairs they are faced with the same inexorable dilemma, from which there is no escape <sup>1</sup>.'

Lord Halifax was perhaps being too absolute. In the long train of events which culminated in war the countries of the Commonwealth had on the whole moved together. <sup>2</sup> When there were divergences no dominion criticism lacked responsible support in the **United Kingdom**. The overseas British in the Dominions had at least as much influence over war and peace as had their cousins who had remained in the Old World. The famous complaint of Andrew Fisher could not have been

made in 1940: that as Prime Minister of **Australia** he had less influence over foreign policy than if he had remained a Scottish miner.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, it could reasonably be argued that in the nineteen-thirties—as indeed during the course of the war—the views of the Government of a million and a half New Zealanders received much more consideration than their numbers and relative importance warranted. The ground of complaint, if such existed, lay elsewhere. It was that in a world of power politics small countries are inevitably committed by the policies adopted by their neighbours and associates: a fact which great countries sometimes ignore and sometimes count upon. And as regards the British countries the fact remained to the end—and Lord Halifax was partly responsible for it—that the consultation clearly provided for in the constitution of the Commonwealth still amounted too often to a mere exchange of information and, more particularly, to supply of information by the **United Kingdom** to the Dominions.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 25 Jan 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Elliott and Hall, *Commonwealth at War*, p. 13. Chamberlain's policy 'was as near to being a common foreign policy of the whole British Commonwealth as any policy since 1919'.

<sup>3</sup> Curtis, *Problems of the Commonwealth*, p. 9, quoting *The times*, 31 Jan 1916.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



## CHAPTER 6 – DEFENCE POLICY

## CHAPTER 6

### *Defence Policy*

IN respect of external relations—as indeed in much else—the impact of a Labour government sharpened and clarified existing trends in New Zealand evolution and set the course for the wartime period. It was perfectly clear well before the final catastrophe that New Zealand would stand by **Britain** in any crisis then conceivable. Yet she plainly proposed to exercise her right to have her own policy, and the directions in which she would exercise her influence—such as it was—were boldly sketched out. Further, though there was some conservative criticism of the Government's plain speech, the line was sufficiently close to that previously followed by the Opposition leaders to give it a broad basis in political assent. In the sanctions crisis the Government of Forbes and Coates made confidential information available to the leaders of the Labour Party. In 1939 they in turn showed the vital cables to Coates and to Adam Hamilton, then Leader of the Opposition; and there is, to say the least, no reason to suppose that in either case the particular decision or the general attitude would have been different if the parties in power had been reversed.

The political decision, however, was only half of the problem: dominion status carried freedom not only to decide whether or not formally to go to war, but also to determine whether participation would be whole-hearted or merely nominal. Mr Chamberlain told the House of Commons in December 1938 that 'It is a matter for each member of the Commonwealth to decide the extent to which it will participate in any war in which any other member of the Commonwealth may be engaged.' He added that the **United Kingdom** would undoubtedly go to the aid of any part of the Commonwealth that was attacked; but made it clear that such a policy could not be presumed for the Dominions.<sup>1</sup> The Imperial General Staff acknowledged in the same year that it had to accept the same uncertainty: 'Each Dominion now had the responsibility for deciding for itself the extent and nature of its defence preparations in time of peace as well as the question whether it should

employ these resources in war in a common cause with the remainder of the Empire <sup>1</sup>.'

In short, entwined with the political problem was the technical difficulty of ensuring that the military efforts of a team of independent nations would be adequately prepared and coordinated. The soldiers might hope 'that the whole of the British Commonwealth would form a united front in an emergency which must ultimately threaten the security of all'; <sup>2</sup> but they could not count on such a united front nor press too boldly for the prior planning necessary to make it effective. **Ireland** would clearly stand aside in any case. At the Imperial Conference of 1937 Mackenzie King said plainly that any attempt to commit **Canada** in advance would destroy national unity. The Australian Opposition was notoriously isolationist and the Government, to say the least, was lukewarm about opposing German expansion in **Europe**. General Hertzog, as Prime Minister of South Africa, said bluntly that his country would give no help if **Britain** became involved in war through interference in the affairs of central or eastern **Europe**. As Stanley Baldwin gently reminded his fellow prime ministers, no democratic community readily goes to war unless a vital national interest is evidently at stake, and it was plain that in no part of the Commonwealth was opinion then ready for a firm commitment to resist **Hitler** by force, nor indeed for a businesslike set of detailed plans for military co-operation by Commonwealth countries. <sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless established procedures within the Commonwealth provided at least a framework for action. Within this framework New Zealand had of all the Dominions probably the least to contribute in material resources: but in spite of strong anti-war sentiment, she had less psychological difficulty than any of them in contemplating prior commitments and in accepting British leadership. On technical as well

as political grounds her defence, like her economic existence, was inconceivable to her citizens except in terms of co-operation with **Britain**. Yet the upshot, even for New Zealand, was a group of commitments which, however clear in political principle, remained up till the outbreak of war obscure when translated into practical terms.

New Zealand, like every dominion, accepted 'primary responsibility for its own local defence'.<sup>4</sup> Yet this notion was almost devoid of meaning when applied to an isolated community without naval, air, or industrial resources, except in so far as it gave respectability to the commonsense determination not to despatch an expeditionary

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<sup>1</sup> COS paper, 15 Oct 1938, quoting CID paper of June 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Imperial Conference, 1937, 3rd meeting, 21 May 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Resolutions of Imperial Conference, 1923.

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force if New Zealand was in danger of invasion. Plainly, the security of New Zealand depended ultimately on victory—military or diplomatic—overseas. 'The defeat of Great Britain would vitally imperil the various Dominions, which, even if successful in their own local defence, would in all probability be lost eventually to the enemy,' wrote the GOC, Major-General Sinclair-Burgess, in April 1936.<sup>1</sup> The primary object, he added, 'is the preservation of the integrity of the Empire as a whole and not merely the local defence of each component part.' In the following year the New Zealand delegation to the Imperial Conference accepted the same line of thought, and it was strongly held at the Defence Conference of April 1939. 'We have to take risks because of the need to make sure that things were all right in the North Sea and the **Atlantic**,' said Walter Nash. 'If we are not all right there it does not matter whether we in the **Pacific** are all right or not.' To the same gathering C.

A. Berendsen, as head of the Prime Minister's Department, went so far as to say that 'there is no disposition in any quarter of New Zealand to question the basic fact that in any war in which the British Commonwealth was involved the decision would be reached in the European theatre, and no one in New Zealand would dream of suggesting that a fleet should come to **Singapore** if such a step might prejudice the situation there. We entirely realise that the defence of New Zealand depends on the defence of the Commonwealth.' The first part of Berendsen's statement would have been vigorously criticised by an insistent minority if made publicly. Nevertheless his conclusion fairly states the views both of the service chiefs and of the community over the whole inter-war period.

What, then, could New Zealand do to help herself and to strengthen the Commonwealth system within which she sought security? The basic answer to this question between 1919 and 1939 was that in the event of war she should send food to **Britain** and fighting men to serve under British command, probably in the traditional battlefields of **France** and the **Middle East**.<sup>2</sup> At the Imperial Conference of 1926, for example, it appeared that New Zealand's plans were already deposited with the War Office in **London**, and that in a major war she was prepared to send at short notice an infantry division and a mounted brigade, and to maintain them for at least three years. Yet in practice this commitment was from time to time fairly heavily qualified by anti-war sentiment, by

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<sup>1</sup> GOC to Minister of Defence, 6 Apr 1936. Mr Churchill had said much the same in the House of Commons on 17 Mar 1914.

<sup>2</sup> 'For we had guessed right: it was to Egypt we were going; as in the previous war we would doubtless train there, even do some fighting in the vicinity, and then go on to **France** for the great battles. So it had been and so it would be ....'— **Kippenberger**, *Infantry Brigadier*, p. 8.

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unpreparedness and lack of funds, and by the impact of her **Pacific**

environment upon a European-minded community.

The last-named factor was of great long-term importance in influencing New Zealand's attitudes. As early as 1921 Massey defined the issue at the Imperial Conference referring to the First World War: 'supposing **Japan** had been on the enemy side, one result would have been quite certain, that neither **Australia** nor New Zealand would have been able to send troops to the front, neither could we have sent food or equipment' for the armed forces or the civil population of Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> At that date, of course, the good neighbourliness of **Japan** was taken for granted, but by 1930 confidence had been to some extent shaken. At the Imperial Conference of that year G. W. Forbes bluntly inquired as to the place of New Zealand's forces in Commonwealth defence, and was answered by the Imperial General Staff in March 1931. **Japan**, it appeared, was the power most likely to challenge Commonwealth security in the **Pacific** area, but it seemed reasonable to hope that before any danger could materialise the **Singapore** base would be completed, the main fleet would reach it, and the general level of Commonwealth defence preparations would be adequate. There followed concrete suggestions which amounted to some alteration of emphasis from **Europe** to the **Pacific** area. The old commitment—that in war New Zealand would on request supply an expeditionary force—still remained. In addition it was now suggested that New Zealand might, if she wished to help, reinforce **Singapore's** peacetime garrison, or train airmen to relieve Royal Air Force units in the **Far East**, or prepare a force to be despatched immediately on the outbreak of war to menaced points in that area.

These suggestions were temporarily lost to sight in the domestic economic crisis, when defence expenditure like everything else was cut to the bone. In New Zealand, as in **Britain** itself, 'the financial and economic risks of the time were [judged to be] even more serious than the military risks.' In September 1931, however, **Japan** launched her Manchurian adventure, and at the beginning of 1933 problems of **Pacific** defence were raised by British experts with a new urgency. The plain

fact, it then seemed, was that the existing condition of the **Singapore** base and other facilities made it impossible for the main fleet to go to the **Far East**: 'The whole of our territory in the **Far East** as well as the coast line of **India** and the Dominions and our vast trade and shipping lies open to attack,' reported the Committee of Imperial Defence in February 1933. And they added some oddly prophetic remarks. 'We have no reason to impute aggressive intentions to **Japan** unless she is goaded into precipitate action'; yet she had shown herself disquieteningly adept

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of Proceedings, Cmd. 1474, p. 31.

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at surprise attacks, and the state of British defence preparations would be greatly tempting to any aggressively minded power.

This strongly worded report was taken up by General Sinclair-Burgess, who on 28 August presented to his government a formidable argument for rearmament. He recommended in some detail a six-year programme of defence expansion, and asked specifically for the adoption of one of the suggestions made by the Imperial authorities in March 1931. A special force of an infantry battalion and an artillery battery should be stationed in **India** in peacetime to be transferred to **Singapore** in war. The men should be recruited for twelve years' service, of which three would be spent overseas; and the result would be an immediate contribution to Imperial defence, and the formation of a reservoir of trained men to be drawn on for an expeditionary force in the event of war.

In spite of the depression, cabinet felt bound to act; yet it remained fearful of public opposition and was firmly held in a European-wise tradition. Nothing was heard of the special force for the **Far East**. That suggestion remained a closely if not quite successfully guarded secret, which the Army hoped to operate one day. This apart, cabinet accepted its advisers' six-year plan for expansion, and the defence vote was slightly increased. A year later, in August 1934, Parliament was asked to approve a further and substantial increase in defence expenditure. The

basis of appeal was broad and emotional—men should defend their homes and womenfolk <sup>1</sup>—and the Opposition complained that for six years there had been nothing like a reasoned government statement on defence policy. <sup>2</sup>

No serious attempt was made to educate Parliament or public opinion as to issues in defence and foreign policy, and in fact the Government was at some pains to conceal what it was doing. <sup>3</sup> In October 1933 the GOC had drafted a short but coherent statement on the recent policy decisions. This was condensed into meaninglessness before publication. The Prime Minister solemnly announced on 13 October <sup>4</sup> that the Government had ‘given consideration to the question of strengthening the defences of New Zealand and has come to certain definite conclusions.’ A beginning was to be made with improvements in aerial defence, but ‘the Territorial force has a responsible task to perform’; liaison with **Australia** would be improved; and certain naval vessels replaced in due course. Critics could be forgiven for thinking that nothing more than

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 239, p. 875.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 755. Cf. Vol. 237, pp. 213, 255.

<sup>3</sup> There was much anxious debate between cabinet ministers, service chiefs and Treasury as to how a rearmament programme might be decided upon and financed over a period of years without recurrent reference to Parliament.

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Post*, 13 Oct 1933.

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a gesture had happened, in spite of the misleading assurance that the Government's proposals had been decided ‘only after the closest consultation with the **United Kingdom**.’ Again, in August 1934, the Minister of Defence, J. G. Cobbe, vigorously denied that the



**Government's defence plans included preparations for an expeditionary force. <sup>1</sup> At this time the Territorial Force was expressly organised so that it could be promptly developed into an expeditionary force, the Army had detailed plans, approved by cabinet, for facilitating the transition, and a cabinet decision on defence policy bracketed the provision of an expeditionary force with local defence as being of primary importance in the general programme.**

**By 1935, in short, New Zealand had embarked on a significant though not very costly armaments expansion, which the politicians did not dare to publicise even though it followed traditional lines. This situation left the Navy and Air Force in a stronger position than the Army, which did not receive adequate political support to cure its lack of equipment and of standing in the community. Yet in the service view, which was tacitly accepted by politicians, an expeditionary force would be New Zealand's major contribution in any war then envisaged. This was made plain in March when the Chiefs of Staff produced a memorandum on the defence of New Zealand to guide the Prime Minister in the forthcoming conference in **London**. This document acknowledged the possibility of war with **Japan**, arising out of trade problems, rather than from hostility to the Empire or desire to conquer parts of it; nevertheless, the whole trend of argument swung away from the **Pacific**, and laid emphasis upon the possibility of war in **Europe** and methods of co-operation with **Britain**, if such a war should come. It was plainly stated that New Zealand must be prepared to send 'the maximum expeditionary force possible', a force which would be proportionately bigger than in 1914–18 because the population had grown. Peacetime organisation should be designed to 'produce an expeditionary force of the maximum size in the shortest possible time', and some definite understanding should be made, on which Great Britain could rely in wartime. It was expressly recognised that if **Japan** were an enemy 'it would be difficult in the early stages to find the necessary naval escort for an expeditionary force', but 'in the case of a war in **Europe** or in the **Middle East** no insurmountable difficulties would arise'; and that was the kind of war which soldiers and statesmen alike anticipated. The alarm**

inspired by Japanese expansion, which had driven the same cabinet to action in 1933, had now evaporated. In April Forbes told his fellow prime ministers in **London** that 'The Japanese question ... was not a matter of special concern in New Zealand. The Japanese had

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 239, pp. 81, 84.

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made no demands on them and were consistently friendly.' New Zealanders remembered that a Japanese cruiser had convoyed the first New Zealand Expeditionary Force, there was 'a certain sentimental basis of friendship with the Japanese, and such feelings of irritation as arose in economic matters were relatively unimportant.'

At the time of the general election in November 1935 the situation was unchanged. Rearmament was being quietly carried out, and the Army knew that the provision of an expeditionary force was in prospect; but to avow this objective, or to make adequate preparations to achieve it, remained politically impossible. The suggestion would have affronted the optimistic and pacific temper of the community, and also alarmed a politically vocal minority that was conscious of New Zealand's position in the **Pacific**. The Government of Forbes and Coates accordingly prevaricated on the matter, and service conviction of the need for strong action was restrained by political expediency, rather than by countervailing argument.

In these circumstances the new Labour Government which took office at the end of 1935 naturally needed some little time to formulate its defence policy. <sup>1</sup> None of its members had had cabinet experience before; nor had they been kept in touch with the developments culminating in the rearmament programme of 1934. They were anti-militarist and opponents of conscription; in so far as they had ideas on defence techniques they apparently believed in small, mechanised, highly trained forces, particularly the Air Force. From the first, however, they were impressed by the seriousness of the trend in world affairs, and to the pleased surprise of their opponents there was no check to the

increase in defence expenditure begun in 1934. On the contrary, within their first two years of office they enunciated ‘a policy of rearmament’ which, said a conservative commentator, ‘ought to satisfy all reasonable criticism <sup>2</sup>.’ It included a considerable strengthening of the Navy, a vastly increased and independent Air Force, and a reorganisation of the Territorial Army which stopped short of conscription, but which was designed for expansion. The Government even expressed its sense of the great importance for New Zealand of the **Singapore** base, the construction of which the Labour Party in opposition had warmly criticised.

The Labour cabinet thus adopted, and in some respects strengthened, the defence programme of its predecessors: a programme based on the assumption that in any foreseeable war **Japan** would be friendly or, if hostile, neutralised by the **Singapore** base.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘We have not so far decided our policy with regard to defence.’—F. Jones, Minister of Defence, *Press*, 10 Jul 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, December 1937, p. 201; *Contemporary New Zealand*, p. 250.

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The outlines of Imperial strategy were public property, and at this time were broadly accepted in both **Australia** <sup>1</sup> and New Zealand: on the outbreak of war in the **Pacific** a strong naval reinforcement would immediately sail to **Singapore**—and hold the base strongly enough to make it unduly risky for any substantial enemy fleet to attack either of the two Dominions. <sup>2</sup> Service advice justified politicians in planning accordingly. Minor attacks plainly could not be prevented, and the calculation was that New Zealand might be raided by a cruiser or by armed merchantmen, which might bombard the ports and land parties of 200 men for each raiding ship. <sup>3</sup> New Zealand accordingly had a primary duty to prepare for dealing with attacks on this scale. Provided nothing more serious had to be contemplated, however, she had considerable

freedom of action: freedom to think in terms of European commitments, of expeditionary forces, and of leisure to prepare for action behind the screen of the Royal Navy. On the other hand that freedom would be gravely limited should **Japan** seem likely to become a determined enemy, and would be instantly destroyed if there should be reason to suppose that Japanese forces might by-pass **Singapore**, or that in certain circumstances the British fleet might not be able to reinforce the base in times of crisis. Accordingly, New Zealand's thinking and emotional attitudes towards defence were necessarily dominated by judgments on the probable attitude of **Japan** and the strategic importance of **Singapore** in times of global warfare.

The attack on **Manchuria** in September 1931 caused some uneasiness, but relatively little public criticism in New Zealand. Most newspaper comment condemned Japanese methods, but recognised that **Japan** had a major economic problem to solve and that 'the expansion of a virile and increasing people is inevitable <sup>4</sup>.' The country as a whole allowed its preoccupations with economic problems and the general trend of its strategic thinking to remain undisturbed by nightmares of immediate war with **Japan**.

A sharp new turn was given to the situation by **Japan's** renewed attack on **China** in August 1937. By contrast with 1931 and 1932, there was now an emphatic public reaction in New Zealand. A section of opinion, mainly conservative, which had long feared Japanese expansion as the spearhead of Asiatic reaction against the West, now pointed to visible proof of the danger, and found unaccustomed allies in powerful sections of the trade union movement. Railwaymen and watersiders saw this new outbreak as another fascist adventure of the pattern made familiar by **Italy**

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, December 1937, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Dominion*, 22 Aug 1939, ministerial statement.

<sup>3</sup> NZPD, Vol. 246, p. 560.

<sup>4</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 18 Mar 1933; McKinlay in *Pacific Affairs*, 1933.

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and **Germany** in Ethiopia and **Spain**, an adventure, moreover, which would extend from **China** to engulf the whole **Pacific** area under Japanese domination. They accordingly proclaimed a boycott on goods destined for **Japan**, and the Federation of Labour also urged its members to boycott Japanese imports. It was acknowledged that such measures would have little material importance in impeding the Japanese militarists; 'but any action taken by New Zealand had a valuable propaganda effect in other countries', and it was claimed that on this occasion the New Zealand watersiders led the world in holding up Japanese cargoes. The New Zealand Government took very seriously this vigorous action among its followers. There was a conference between cabinet ministers, officials of the Federation of Labour and the waterside workers, and it was agreed that the ships should be worked, but that the export of scrap iron should be prohibited in the interests of New Zealand industry. The campaign for a boycott of Japanese goods went on.

With this background Mr Jordan, as New Zealand's representative at Geneva and at the **Brussels** conference of November 1937, pressed for the application of the Covenant and deplored the failure to find some basis of collective action. In September 1938 New Zealand and **Russia** alone criticised the platonic resolution with which the Council of the League met **China**'s appeal for help, and Jordan expressed his country's 'sincere regret that the terms of the Covenant are not being collectively applied without qualification in conditions about which there is unfortunately no room for doubt.' New Zealand maintained this general attitude through 1939. There is evidence that while **Australia** was cautious and feared that **Britain** might go too far in opposing **Japan**, New Zealand was uneasy at the possibility that principle might be sacrificed in an effort at 'appeasement'. There was much criticism

among rank and file members of the Labour Party of the so-called Tokyo Agreement of July 1939, when **Britain** recognised that ‘Japanese forces in **China** have special requirements for the purpose of safeguarding their own security and maintaining public order in regions under their control, and that they have to suppress or remove any such acts or causes as will obstruct them or benefit their enemy <sup>1</sup>.’ The Government, when pressed on the point, was non-committal but admitted that it had not known in advance the terms of the agreement between **Britain** and **Japan**.

The whole episode seemed to some New Zealanders to show not only the weakening of the British Empire in the **Far East** and **Pacific** but also that Empire policy in a matter vitally affecting

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Japan's New Order in East Asia*, p. 150. It is perhaps noteworthy that this scholarly book deals with British policy in the **Pacific** virtually without consideration of the importance of that policy to Australians and New Zealanders.

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New Zealand could still in emergencies be decided in **London** without the full consultation provided for in the constitution of the Commonwealth. Further, it left the impression that New Zealand was more anxious than **Britain** herself that a stand should be made against **Japan**. At a time when the Germans were seriously trying to persuade **Japan** that England was obviously her number one enemy, <sup>1</sup> New Zealand among British countries had taken the strongest public stand against Japanese policy.

Between 1933 and 1939, in short, New Zealand opinion was reluctantly assimilating two disturbing facts: that in a new war **Japan** might not be an ally or even a friendly neutral, and that the consequence of Japanese hostility would be more serious to New Zealand than to those British statesmen who controlled Commonwealth policy in the **Pacific**. Realisation of responsibilities involved in being a **Pacific** country brought, therefore, not subservience to her predominant

partner, but renewed willingness to differ from **Britain**. In this matter, political judgment was reinforced by a new sense of intimacy. If things went wrong in the **Pacific** the impact on the Commonwealth partners would be fundamentally different: as the perspicacious head of the New Zealand Army, General Sinclair-Burgess, noted during the earlier scare of 1933, ‘the difference in degree is that between embarrassment in the case of Great Britain and disaster in the case of New Zealand <sup>2</sup>.’

Accordingly, as tension mounted, New Zealanders naturally rated higher than did Englishmen both the likelihood and the destructive possibilities of a Japanese move against a weakened Commonwealth. In February 1936, for example, the incoming government was told by its service chiefs that **Australia** and New Zealand were ‘open to attack as never before in their histories.’ The Singapore base, they noted, when completed ‘will act as some deterrent to Japanese activities’, but, they added, the British main fleet, the greater part of which would be required at **Singapore** to deal with a serious Japanese attack, could not move east of **Suez** if things were complicated in **Europe**. <sup>3</sup> In December 1936 they returned to the attack with a forcible reminder that on any reasonable calculation the fleet would, for the foreseeable future, be tied firmly to European waters. The risk of invasion remained, therefore, unless New Zealand could obtain an explicit promise that an adequate fleet would arrive at **Singapore** in time. <sup>4</sup>

Thus prompted, the New Zealand delegation raised the matter at the Imperial Conference of 1937. ‘There was a feeling in New

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<sup>1</sup> *Nazi-Soviet Relations*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Toynbee, *World in March 1939*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> GOC to Minister of Defence, 27 Feb 1936.

<sup>4</sup> GOC to Minister of Defence, 16 Dec 1936.

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Zealand,' said M. J. Savage, 'that if the **United Kingdom** were hard pressed the Dominions in the **Pacific** would get little assistance from her.' His view, he said, 'was emphatically that all must sink or swim together.' The delegation was reassured, but in general terms only, and in fact realised clearly enough that the reinforcement of **Singapore** in wartime would depend on the course of the fighting in the **Atlantic**. Indeed the British Government firmly resisted any attempts to extract from it the specific promise which New Zealand desired. As late as August 1938 <sup>1</sup> she was notified that her Chiefs of Staff were not justified in assuming that the Navy would proceed to **Singapore** 'in sufficient strength to serve as a strong deterrent against any threat to Commonwealth interests.' 'The standard of naval strength' to be sent to the **Far East** 'was still under consideration.' In February 1939 the Imperial authorities for the first time said explicitly that **Singapore** would be reinforced if the Commonwealth were involved in war both in **Europe** and the **Pacific**: this promise was warmly welcomed by the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff, but they emphasised with some pain that the British pledge was silent both on the strength and timing of the reinforcement. The fact was that the period before relief, which was put at forty-two days in 1926, was now thought to be at least ninety days; and it was by no means clear whether the reckoning started with the outbreak of war or with the naval clearing of European waters. By 1939 the British promise to reinforce **Singapore**, which was the basis of Imperial strategy in the whole **Pacific** area, had been qualified almost out of existence. <sup>2</sup>

The resulting situation was regarded realistically in New Zealand. In 1933 the Army estimated that New Zealand would have to hold out alone for two months; in 1936 it put the period at six months, with the reflection that if the fleet could not in the end reach **Singapore**, **Australia** and New Zealand would have to defend themselves indefinitely from their own resources. <sup>3</sup> At the end of 1938 the New Zealand Council of Defence was told by its chief civilian official, C. A. Berendsen, that 'New Zealand might well get no assistance from Great Britain for very many months or even years'; and the Navy spokesman 'agreed that the



British fleet could not come to **Singapore** for an indefinite period.'

If justified, these fears made nonsense of the traditional conception of New Zealand's wartime activity—an expeditionary force fighting in **Europe** or **Egypt**; for if New Zealand were in danger of invasion, no statesman could contemplate sending men beyond the

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<sup>1</sup> SSSA to GGNZ, 4 Aug 1938.

<sup>2</sup> According to **Cordell Hull**, **Halifax** told the American Ambassador on 22 March 1939 that, in spite of the British promise to **Australia**, the fleet could not be sent to **Singapore**. **France**, it was said, had vetoed the plan.—Jones, *Japan's New Order*, p. 149n

<sup>3</sup> Conference of 28 Sep 1933; GOC to Minister of Defence. 27 Feb 1936

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**Pacific** area, nor even embarking them on transports unless the seaways were reasonably safe. During most of the period 1936–39 expert opinion appeared to be that New Zealand must face six months of initial isolation if the Commonwealth should be at war simultaneously with **Germany** and **Japan**—a circumstance all too likely to arise—and that her strategy must simply be to hold out until rescued. Her soldiers, however well equipped and well intentioned, might be land-bound indefinitely, and New Zealand's military effort be confined to the raw materials and the trickle of technicians and airmen who might slip through a blockade. Some experts added, indeed, that food and technicians would represent **Britain's** essential needs in any likely war better than an expeditionary force. New Zealand's manpower could perhaps best be employed in producing the food which **Britain** might be no longer able to draw from **Denmark** and the **Argentine**.

Such was the trend of military opinion. Its upshot coincided with views still influential in the Labour Party: that an expeditionary force

would be strategically undesirable; and that preparations for it would be a militaristic gesture which could in any case be maintained only by conscription. The probable role of the Army, therefore, remained shrouded in mystery, and New Zealand's growing sense of peril in her own hemisphere had the paradoxical result of preserving chaos in her defence planning. The political decision remained unbreakable: New Zealand would stand with **Britain** in any crisis then imaginable. Yet technical preparations did not match that decision. It is true that no difficulty arose with the Navy, for it had always been understood that in wartime the New Zealand Division would pass under Admiralty control. New Zealand's willing acceptance of this arrangement had been reiterated and accepted in September and October 1935 when war with **Italy** had seemed possible. Nor was there much difficulty with the Air Force, which was expanding fast, and which expected to have two new squadrons of modern aircraft available for overseas service; <sup>1</sup> though it may be noted that New Zealand preferred to train men for the **RAF** rather than provide units to relieve the **RAF** in the **Far East**. The real problem lay with the Army. Of all the three services its political position was the weakest, it faced the greatest psychological and economic obstacles to expansion, and its role in any future war was the hardest to define. Awareness of danger in the **Far East** and growing insistence on a specifically New Zealand policy towards **Japan**, while temporarily destroying the basic plan of a Europeanwise expeditionary force, laid no alternative task on the Army, and did virtually nothing to restore its prestige in the community. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary New Zealand*, p. 255.

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most important concrete suggestion was the revival of the idea that New Zealanders should help garrison **Singapore** in peacetime; a suggestion made in private, and ill received, partly because of the notion that New Zealand troops might be used to maintain civil order. The apologist for the Army could say in general terms that New Zealand's military forces would undoubtedly be important if war came and that

patriots should enlist in the Territorials: but such imprecision could make but little public impact. Volunteers, in the temper of the nineteen-thirties, needed cogent arguments, and a clearer conception of what they might be called upon to do.

The situation was in sharp contrast with that preceding the First World War. Then it was clear to all concerned that in a war with **Germany** an expeditionary force would be needed. The idea had a certain appeal, and in any case under the new system of compulsory service, peacetime training could be planned accordingly. In the nineteen-thirties public sentiment was on the whole unfavourable, and as late as June and July 1939 the Prime Minister, while appealing for recruits, gave ample assurance that no one would be compelled to serve overseas. The Government's professed policy was that New Zealand should defend herself and also British interests in the South Pacific, but should make no promise to send forces elsewhere; New Zealand would stand with **Britain**, but as to the disposition of her manpower would 'wait until the time shows what we ought to do <sup>1</sup>.' The Army was thus denied the tangible objective of an expeditionary force by official pronouncement as well as by commonsense calculation; nor was there any clearly conceived threat to New Zealand soil which could give emotional reality to plans for local defence. It was natural, therefore, that the Army should lag behind in the defence expansion programme launched in 1934: it continued to be desperately short of equipment and trained manpower, and army service ranked low in sentimental appeal.

The Government's plan to deal with the general situation was announced in August 1937. The aim was a small force of high mechanisation and efficiency, which could fill the threefold function: to garrison the main ports, to provide a small field force, with an eye to raiding parties attacking other parts of the country, and to build a cadre of skilled men who could in an emergency train recruits and quickly expand the Army to a division. The training was to be made more realistic and interesting and a special Reservist Force was created whose men were to receive vocational as well as military training. Late in 1937

a campaign was launched to attract recruits, appealing to the public 'to make some sacrifice, and endeavour to infuse into defence some of the enthusiasm

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 254, p. 172.

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—almost religious in its devotion—which the average New Zealander shows towards the game of Rugby football <sup>1</sup>.' The results of these efforts were disappointing. The roll of Territorials remained at about 8000, of whom, it was said, not more than one-third had completed their full training. There were plenty of volunteers for the Air Force, but till the eleventh hour the community as a whole lacked interest in the Army, and its weakness was such that in April 1939 there was doubt whether it could have provided without notice a unit of 500 well-equipped men for **Singapore.** <sup>2</sup>

In short, the Government's efforts to strengthen the Army made little progress, as was evident enough to interested citizens. The result was sporadic, but sometimes searching, criticism of this side of New Zealand defence policy. In August 1936 Parliament held what was its first full-dress debate on defence since the abolition of compulsory training, when the Opposition moved to refer back to the Government for consideration the annual report of the GOC Defence Forces. <sup>3</sup> Two months later a Defence League was established under the chairmanship of Mr William Perry, a Legislative Councillor and President of the Returned Soldiers' Association. In 1938 this organisation became really active, and the National Party became seriously concerned about the shortcomings of the country's defences. The opinion grew among soldiers, and among conservatives generally, that only compulsion could produce the men necessary to put the Army in order. Accordingly, the Government was pressed from many quarters to re-apply the existing compulsory service law for the benefit of the Territorials.

In answer to this campaign the Minister of Defence on 17 May 1938 gave a lengthy and detailed account of the Government's defence policy.

The record was not unimpressive, but the Minister expressed conviction that 9000 would be an adequate peacetime strength for the Army, and admitted that the existing strength was 7400, of whom only 41 per cent had attended camp that year. The following day four colonels of the Territorial Force issued a manifesto declaring their conviction of the complete inadequacy of the system of land defence; and they said bluntly that the voluntary system had failed owing to lack of support for the Army by successive governments. Their precipitate action was widely publicised, but was in plain violation of military regulations. They were accordingly placed on the retired list, though cabinet told **General Freyberg** at the end of the following year that he could, if he wished, make use of their services in the Expeditionary Force then being organised.

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, December 1937, p. 203; *Contemporary New Zealand*, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> Statement by Minister of Defence, 17 Apr 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 246, p. 535.

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In spite of this spectacular incident, public discussion on the Army during 1938 remained inconclusive. It was significant that in the election campaign of September-October 1938 the National Party, while castigating the Government for the inadequacies of its defence policy, refrained from advocating compulsory service. Certain public bodies, it is true, pronounced firmly in favour of conscription: the Farmers' Union in May, for instance, <sup>1</sup> and the November conference of the Defence League. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, government spokesmen, under pressure, sometimes cautiously admitted that among the incalculable necessities of war, compulsion might turn out to be necessary. <sup>3</sup> Yet to the commonsense view compulsory service in peacetime made sense only as a step towards the sending of a large-scale expeditionary force soon after the outbreak of a new war. The theoretical possibility of such an expeditionary force

was, of course, present in army thinking, as for instance during the **Munich** crisis, when the Chief of the General Staff warned his officers that, if the enemy should be **Germany** alone, such a force would be quickly armed and despatched.<sup>4</sup> Yet opinion, professional as well as lay, refused to accept the prompt despatch of an expeditionary force as the probable—or even the possible—consequence of war.<sup>5</sup> No one questioned that the young men would flock to serve when fighting actually began. In the meantime, Territorial service had relatively little appeal to the community and it remains doubtful whether Government ‘support’ or renewed exhortations from older men could have made very much difference until the obscurity shrouding the New Zealand Army's role in a new war had been dispelled.

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 25 May 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *Dominion*, 18 Nov 1938.

<sup>3</sup> e.g., Savage, in *Dominion*, 3 Jun 1938.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum of 16 Sep 1938.

<sup>5</sup> *Contemporary New Zealand*, pp. 262–3; *NZPD*, Vol. 251, p. 343 (Fagan); *Evening Post*, 27 Sep 1938 (Barnard).

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 7 – THE ELEVENTH HOUR



## CHAPTER 7

### *The Eleventh Hour*

**THE** intractable chaos of British Commonwealth strategy in the Pacific was surveyed with dignity and commonsense by a conference of defence experts drawn from Britain, Australia and New Zealand in Wellington in April 1939. For New Zealand thinking about defence this conference was a decisive experience: or perhaps, more accurately, would have been decisive if time for effective action had still remained. The meeting itself originated in a New Zealand suggestion, and New Zealand was the driving force throughout. For her officials and politicians the mere organisation of such a gathering was an education, apart from the material information which came to light, and the conference drew together the streams of foreign policy and strategic thinking which had at times seriously diverged. More specifically, it made an essential conversion within the New Zealand cabinet. The Prime Minister, M. J. Savage, was in this context the key person. Personally optimistic and anti-militarist, he resisted the political judgment that armed force in addition to good will might be necessary to resist evil; and he was repelled by the idea that New Zealand manpower should be sent to fight overseas. Accordingly, though his cabinet had approved of expanding preparations for defence, the emphasis lay on Air Force and Navy and technical *expertise*; and the Prime Minister himself was unimpressed by the need to strengthen the Army. In April 1939 he changed his mind. 'The conclusions reached by the Pacific Defence Conference,' he said later, <sup>1</sup> 'convinced me of the necessity of having in New Zealand not only a modern Air Force and Navy, but also an Army reasonable in numbers and efficient, with a proper scale of modern weapons.' In the remaining months of peace the Prime Minister threw his powerful influence into the strengthening of the Army in terms which in good faith repudiated the possibility of an expeditionary force, but in fact directly prepared for it.

The Defence Conference of 1939 arose from a request made by Savage to the Imperial Conference in May 1937 that there should be

discussions between **Britain**, **Australia** and New Zealand on the strategic importance of the **Pacific** islands. Following up the idea

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 23 Jun 1939.

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a year later, New Zealand suggested a conference between these three countries on the 'widest aspects' of **Pacific** defence, a notion soon sharpened to mean the 'strategic situation in the Western Pacific in its widest aspect and embracing all those political, economic and geographical considerations which would arise in a simultaneous war in **Europe**.' The British Government approved, and recommended that the proposed conference should be held in **Wellington** forthwith. The Australian Government demurred, possibly because Australian politics were dislocated by the approaching need to find a new prime minister. Service chiefs and ministers were busy, it explained, and questions of higher policy, both political and strategic, should be discussed in **London** rather than in **Wellington**. It wished, in particular, to exclude discussion on one of the topics most interesting to New Zealand and **Britain**—the **Pacific** islands, with special reference to air routes and to American policy—and tied down its delegates to the discussion of technical service matters. <sup>1</sup> The United Kingdom, for her part, wished like New Zealand for a broadly based discussion; and the conference was important largely because this view in effect prevailed.

The preliminary discussions showed clearly the trend of New Zealand thinking and the nature of problems yet unsolved. The New Zealand Government was greatly impressed by the deterioration in the world situation since the Imperial Conference of mid-1937, and more particularly by the likelihood that trouble in the **Pacific** would coincide with a major European war. Not only did an attack by **Japan** seem more probable to New Zealanders than to Englishmen; if it came, the danger appeared to them to be much greater. There was plainly scepticism in New Zealand about the British axiom that **Singapore** would stand indefinitely in a global war and, while held, protect New Zealand from

any attack more serious than sporadic bombardment and 200–men raiding parties. Current reports suggested the Japanese bases might even be out-flanking **Singapore**. No one in authority counted for a moment on prompt American rescue in a war against **Japan**, and not much comfort was drawn by laymen from study on the map of the relative positions of **Singapore**, **Truk** and **Pearl Harbour**—let alone **San Francisco**. Nor were existing preparations within the Western Pacific area satisfactory. Key islands were still virtually undefended, though small forces might well suffice to protect them. In defence matters there was virtually no liaison with **Australia**, New Zealand's closest neighbour, the ally to whom she was tied by virtual identity of strategic interests, and a vital source of supply. How, in fact, were New Zealand's forces to be equipped in the event of a

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<sup>1</sup> PM Aust to PM NZ, 29 Mar 1939 and 1 Apr 1939.

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**Pacific** war which everyone believed would involve a six-months' break in overseas communications? Her reserves of equipment had long been based on the needs of the first echelon of a hypothetical expeditionary force, it being assumed that the rest of the force would find its equipment at an overseas base. In 1936 the Army had asked that its reserves should be based on the needs of a whole division, a request presumably received sympathetically but without effective action.<sup>1</sup> Even the modest orders recorded in 1938 could not be fulfilled by British manufacturers, who were fully occupied with the **United Kingdom's** own rearmament programme. At the beginning of 1939 the military equipment held in New Zealand was evidently inadequate for mobilisation; and her soldiers were anxiously inquiring where they could get more—in peacetime, let alone in war.

New Zealand's first preoccupation was, then, with the possible consequence of an attack by **Japan** timed to coincide with a European crisis, but her growing **Pacific** consciousness gave her an additional reason for interest in the islands of the **Pacific** area. In particular, it led

her to participate in an obscure tussle between the two great powers on whom her safety depended. If Britain should be fully committed in **Europe**, the hopes of **Australia** and New Zealand lay in the slow movement of American opinion against those countries which, it so happened, menaced also the British Commonwealth. <sup>2</sup> At this time, however, American activity in the central **Pacific** was causing considerable apprehension. The immense possibilities of civil aviation brought great promise to a country so isolated as New Zealand and so dependent economically and culturally on overseas contacts; but it also brought embarrassing competition for potential bases. In the nineteen-thirties British and American interests were feeling their way towards trans- **Pacific** air routes, and great stress was suddenly thrown on possible air bases, both in islands of admitted ownership, and in countless others, many of them scarcely known, about which no government had been greatly concerned. Some spheres of influence were acknowledged, or at least persistently claimed, but there were numerous islands whose inclusion with the main groups was marginal, or where doubt might arise when the prizes had become valuable. In 1935 the **United States** acted in such a case by annexing Howland, Baker and Jarvis Islands, which **Britain** regarded as part of the Phoenix Group; and next year the claim was pushed to include **Canton**, Christmas and Enderbury Islands within the same group. Of these, Christmas Island was within the area patrolled by the

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<sup>1</sup> GOC to Minister of Defence, 12 May 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. vigorous over-statement by T. Dennett, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 18, p. 125.

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New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy. American claims, which were formally listed for the first time on 5 April 1939, included certain of the **Cook Islands** and Tokelaus which New Zealand had for years regarded as indisputably hers. <sup>1</sup>

These proceedings naturally led to complex diplomacy, of which New Zealand was kept informed, and her opinion frequently asked. Great Britain agreed to discuss marginal cases, and ultimately accepted an American suggestion that **Canton** and Enderbury Islands should be jointly controlled for fifty years, without prejudice to ultimate ownership. Her view, however, was that claims for islands were connected with the general problem of trans- **Pacific** air routes, and that the four countries concerned— **USA**, **Britain**, **Australia** and New Zealand—should confer to plan a solution for the problem as a whole. Co-operation of several governments was clearly essential, and the possession of various islands could best be decided when the needs of the rival services had been studied in a joint political and technical discussion. The United States rejected this approach. She refused to confer on the broad problem of civilian aviation or to agree to the principle that the countries concerned should give each other reciprocal rights in their various territories. She laid claim to a string of islands which bit deep into territories long regarded as British, and which would have given a chain of potential air bases. American action at **Canton**, moreover, showed that in crucial cases the only claim she would recognise was that the claimant was actually developing the islands in question, and was not merely represented there by governmental officials. Between 1935 and 1939, then, there was something like a scramble to establish island claims in the central **Pacific**. Ostensibly it was a matter of legal definitions. Behind lay rivalry in commercial air routes, and perhaps behind this again, at least in American eyes, the possibility of a naval war against **Japan**.

New Zealand's policy in this tug-of-war behind the scenes was to support the British attitude, with perhaps slightly greater asperity than **Britain** herself. She clearly wanted to prevent British aviation in the **Pacific** from being swamped by **America**: therefore she wanted surveys to be pushed ahead, and took an active part in them. The cruisers **Achilles** and **Leander** were used in such surveys, and in October 1938 New Zealand willingly acted on a British request to prepare an air base on Christmas Island, one of the most important and most controversial of

the islands concerned. She approved of discussions on marginal islands—while refusing to admit that any of hers fell within this category—and urged that, if necessary to win reciprocal rights, the British countries should refuse landing rights to the Americans.

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<sup>1</sup> See map facing p. 195.

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In relation to the **Pacific** islands, then, as in relation to **Japan**, New Zealand had worked herself into a foreign policy mildly independent from that of the **United Kingdom**. Perhaps it would be fanciful to find here echoes of the **Pacific** imperialism of Grey and Vogel and Seddon. Yet New Zealand may well have been responding to the same basic factors which stung those elder statesmen to aspire to leadership of the British peoples in the **Pacific** area. To men of foresight, New Zealand's destiny was tied up with trade and communications in that area, no less than with her lifeline to **Europe**. She had, in fact, the embarrassment of an inescapable dualism: tied at once to **Europe** and the **Pacific**, she was deeply committed to **Britain**, yet was situated in an area where American was displacing British dominance. Some aspects of this change appeared to distress her Ministers more than their colleagues in **London**; but it was with British approval that New Zealand proposed for the conference agenda an item covering 'Policy in relation to Trans- **Pacific** air routes and **United States** activities in the **Pacific**.'

The Pacific Defence Conference opened in **Wellington** on 14 April 1939. On the crucial issue of **Singapore**, the British delegation was firmly optimistic. The base would be reinforced, even in a simultaneous war against **Germany** and **Japan**. No crisis in the **Mediterranean** area, however severe, would interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the **Far East**, and it could reasonably be presumed that the **Singapore** base would hold out indefinitely. Thus protected from any risk of major attack, New Zealand could plan long-term co-operation along much the same lines as in the First World War. 'Once New Zealand is involved in war,' wrote the British Chiefs of Staff, 'the best means by which her land forces can co-



operate is by the formation of a division, as in 1914–18, and its eventual despatch for operations overseas wherever it can be employed most usefully. We suggest that in peace time the New Zealand Army should be organised with this role in view, so that the division could be despatched in as short a time as possible.’ Admiralty spokesmen also denied that New Zealand's overseas communications would be cut in the opening months of warfare against a combination of **Germany** and **Japan**. By ‘evasive routing’, they said, most ships would get through. <sup>1</sup>

The New Zealand delegation, it seems, remained respectfully unconvinced. They did not know that, at this very time, the British Government was pressing the **United States** to transfer its fleet to the **Pacific** on the ground that it would be unable to honour its

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<sup>1</sup> Sir R. Colvin on 14 Apr 1939.

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promise to send a fleet to the **Far East** in the event of war. <sup>1</sup> They could, however, recall facts placed before them in the past and draw upon commonsense. Their conclusion was plainly that the promise to reinforce **Singapore** was qualified so heavily that, in spite of its firm appearance, wise men would reckon on there being no fleet in the **Far East** for an indefinite period. Maybe they had gathered the substance of a decision reached about this time by the Admiralty, that the estimated period necessary for the relief of **Singapore** must be raised from 90 days to 180 after the outbreak of war. <sup>2</sup> A reinforcement which could not arrive for at least six months after fighting began—and then presumably only if the Navy had been clearly victorious in European waters—was a reinforcement which should not be counted upon by those living in a menaced area. The New Zealanders accordingly judged that, in spite of **Singapore**, their country would be in danger of invasion in a global war: and the Americans based their strategy on the assumption that there would be no British battle fleet in the **Pacific** area. <sup>3</sup>

So far as concerned New Zealand, such conclusions were of political, not of military importance. They showed an attitude, which influenced

wartime and post-war policy; they could not lead to adequate preparations to meet the eventuality that was feared. A hint of the reality was contained in a dialogue which then sounded almost flippant. Suppose, asked the New Zealanders, that **Singapore** has fallen and the reinforcing fleet has been smashed, how do we then defend New Zealand? 'Take to the Waitomo Caves', replied the British delegation. The exchange was significant. The British delegates refused to take seriously a fundamental factor in New Zealand thinking—that **Singapore** was vulnerable, and that with or without it, New Zealand was in danger. On the other hand, supposing New Zealand to be exposed to major attack, the preparations she could make were desperately limited by lack of industrial resources, local or overseas, even if she undertook a ruinous expenditure. The consciousness of danger, and of the impossibility of doing anything about it, was a factor in New Zealand statesmanship until the tide of **Pacific** warfare turned decisively in 1943.

Leaving speculation, the Defence Conference considered possibilities; and on this plane an easy reconciliation was found between the British and New Zealand viewpoints. It was not even necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, p. 630. In May 1939 the Committee of Imperial Defence was to accept the view that 'There are so many variable factors which could not at-present be assessed that it is not possible to state definitely how soon after Japanese intervention a fleet could be despatched to the **Far East**. Neither is it possible to enumerate precisely the size of the fleet we could afford to send'.

<sup>2</sup> General Percival's *Report on Malaya*, para. 22. (Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 26 Feb 1948.)

<sup>3</sup> Morison, *United States Naval Operations*, Vol. III, p. 49.

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to raise forcibly the politically awkward problems of conscription and of an eventual expeditionary force. No express preparations had



been made for such a force, yet it was agreed that New Zealand, if isolated, would need home defence. Therefore, it was said, let men be raised, 'and if they are trained to defend New Zealand they will know how to defend other places too': that is, strategic points for the protection of New Zealand which lay outside her own territory. Moreover, it was agreed, they would be eager to do so. 'If you had the men here, you would not be able to stop them. If there were an overland route [to the battlefield] they would walk there.' Accordingly, it was judged, if New Zealand prepared adequately for home defence, the question of an expeditionary force would settle itself, as soon as it should turn out to be possible to send men overseas.

In the upshot, the Defence Conference placed its authority behind a line of thinking already accepted by New Zealand soldiers; that the Army must be considerably strengthened with the immediate object of equipping it to deal with substantial raids—or even with major attacks—but with the ulterior hope that it would also be thus enabled to provide an expeditionary force at need. This policy—with explicit reference to an expeditionary force tactfully omitted—now became that of the **New Zealand Government**; and Major-General P. J. Mackesy, chief British military delegate, was invited to remain to advise as to details. Meanwhile, discussion at the conference showed where the crucial problem lay—in equipment rather than in men. British advice was to build up locally stocks to cover mobilisation as well as a period to allow reprovisioning from the **United Kingdom**; no time was mentioned, except that it must be longer than for reinforcing **Singapore**. No allowance had been made for New Zealand's needs, however, in estimating **Britain's** manufacturing capacity in wartime. The conference was told firmly that no provision had been made in the **United Kingdom** to make munitions for New Zealand after the outbreak of war, and that nothing would be done at the British end without firm orders, which should therefore be placed immediately. The situation was such, however, that there would be long delay in delivering anything ordered now. Nor could much help be expected from Australian industry. Local defence needs would absorb all that was being produced, and though expansion was not in itself

difficult it would take time. Plans for the supply of munitions to New Zealand's forces were evidently in a rudimentary state as late as April 1939; and the conference could not do much more than lay bare the problem.

In dealing with the **Pacific** islands, New Zealand was in some sense the pacemaker, and her government was very conscious of the development of modern aviation which gave vastly increased importance to the islands in her neighbourhood. **Fiji** and **Tonga**, noted the Chiefs of Staff in December 1938, are 'entirely undefended, they invite capture'. A Japanese expedition, once established, could be dislodged only by a major operation; meantime it would disastrously disrupt shipping and bring much of New Zealand within range of air attack. The New Zealand delegation, therefore, pressed upon the conference the strategic importance of the islands to the north. For her part she had already promised to garrison **Fanning Island** and offered to keep a brigade group ready to reinforce **Fiji** and other islands. The conference's general conclusion was that it was impossible to defend all islands that might be useful to the Japanese. **Fiji**, it was agreed, should be held and plans were prepared. For the rest, there must be reliance on small local militia forces to make landing difficult and a mobile force to deal with intruders. In May 1939 it was reported that small defence forces actually existed at Ocean Island, **Fanning Island**, and **Tulagi**. The plan was to make these forces strong enough to deal with raids by forces of up to 200 men; this, of course, being the official estimate of the strength of raids which might be expected by New Zealand itself.

The problem of the **Pacific** islands, however, obviously concerned friends as well as enemies, and the New Zealand delegation urged that a co-operative air route should be organised with the Americans by 'the granting of full reciprocal rights' to the aircraft of either nationality operating along a common route; though British countries should control the Tasman. It urged also that a British policy towards American claims on **Pacific** islands must be 'formulated and agreed upon'. To many this insistence was ill-timed. The cardinal problem in the **Pacific**

appeared to be that of planning for a war against **Japan** and **Germany** simultaneously, and no positive conclusions were reached on attitudes towards **America**. The New Zealand Government, however, remained intensely uneasy lest the Americans might, with the additional advantage of British preoccupation in **Europe**, oust British aviation from the **Pacific** and establish claims among the islands. This uneasiness was strongly expressed as late as November 1939, when New Zealand urged that the trans-Tasman link should be quickly established for reasons of prestige in the **Pacific** as well as for material and strategic purposes. The whole matter, however, was soon dropped by common consent, New Zealand being watchdog to the last, on the ground that discussions likely to irritate one's friends should be postponed till the enemy was beaten.

When the Defence Conference separated, General Mackesy remained behind at New Zealand's request to report on the state of her army: his report, together with the conference's own recommendation, set the pattern of New Zealand's preparations in the remaining interval of peace. Many of these preparations were technical, and beyond the scope of this volume; for example, possible air reconnaissance, and the organisation of forces to serve in the **Pacific** islands, and, more generally, the efforts made to obtain munitions, both for home defence and for the equipment of a possible expeditionary force. A good deal was done towards remedying weakness in liaison between the armed forces of the British countries. The conference showed, for example, that information flowed freely between **Britain** and New Zealand but that there was lacking the intimate co-operation given by personal contacts. The Australian and New Zealand navies evidently kept in close touch, but there was need for great improvement with the armies and air forces. In the remaining months of peace, some advance was made in these directions. In the political field, the conference made plain the corresponding need to improve cooperation with the Government of **Australia** on matters of broad policy. This problem had been raised from New Zealand in September 1938, when it was pointed out that the two countries often got information about each other's plans through their mutual contact

with the British Government. New Zealand wanted to 'establish the principle of complete mutual interchange of information between Governments as opposed to between individual services', and favoured periodical conferences. <sup>1</sup> **Australia's** reply had been cautious, and her partial acceptance of New Zealand's proposals did nothing to bridge the considerable difference in point of view between the two governments as revealed in the whole story of the 1939 conference. At this stage, it appears that New Zealand rather than **Australia** was pushing for closer political liaison between the two countries, and for a more independent line in **Pacific** policy. Nor is there much evidence of change in this matter before the Japanese entered the war.

The most serious problem where political decisions were involved, and one which was underlined by the Defence Conference, was that of strengthening New Zealand's army. At this time the Army consisted, in theory, of 9000 men, mainly part-time Territorials, though with a core of professional soldiers. This was indeed a tiny and ill-trained force; yet in 1939 many New Zealanders, civilians and servicemen, too, were frankly doubtful as to whether, in the new war, New Zealand's effort should or could be to produce large numbers of infantry. It might rather be to find a relatively small number of specialists in mechanised warfare, and for the rest to

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War*, Vol. I, p. 338.

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keep up the production of food and raw materials and perhaps to improvise a new range of industries. In these circumstances the Army remained the Cinderella of the forces, and British soldiers sometimes hinted that it could not have dealt satisfactorily even with those minor attacks which might penetrate the screen of a successful Royal Navy. In the view of British advisers an increase was needed for home defence, and such an increase, it was agreed, would enable New Zealand to help others as well as herself. On 4 April 1939 the New Zealand Chiefs of

**Staff said that if the Territorials were now increased by 6000—that is, to divisional strength—a reasonably trained force could be made available for service overseas at fairly short notice'. Three weeks later the Defence Conference recommended such an increase; this, it reported, together with increases to the Regular Army, would 'provide a complete organisation with trained leaders and trained reserves to ensure the security of New Zealand itself against any likely scale of attack, and also to facilitate the rapid organisation and completion of training of the Territorial Force on the outbreak of war.'**



**The Governor-General, Lord Galway, farewells the First Echelon at Parliament Buildings, Wellington, 3 January 1940**

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**Evacuation from Greece, April 1941**

**Evacuation from Greece, April 1941**



Vice-Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, C-in-C Mediterranean, and Major-General B. C. Freyberg on board HMS *Phoebe* after the evacuation of Crete, May 1941



**Vice-Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, C-in-C Mediterranean, and Major-General B. C. Freyberg on Board HMS *Phoebe* after the evacuation of Crete, May 1941**



The ship's company of HMS *Achilles* marching through Auckland on 23 February 1940, on their return after the Battle of the River Plate

**The ship's company of HMS *Achilles* marching through Auckland on 23 February 1940, on their return after the Battle of the River Plate**



The Home Guard: rifle instruction

**The Home Guard: rifle instruction**

Home Guardsmen about to move off on manoeuvres



**Home Guardsmen about to move off on manoeuvres**



Members of the Women's War Service Auxiliary take part in a 'Don't Talk' campaign, November 1941

**Members of the Women's War Service Auxiliary take part in a 'Don't Talk' campaign, November 1941**

Mrs Roosevelt inspecting the Wrens at HMNZS *Philomel*, September 1943. Second from left in front is Commodore Sir Atwell Lake, Chief of the Naval Staff



**Mrs Roosevelt inspecting the Wrens at HMNZS *Philomel*, September 1943. Second from left in front is Commodore Sir Atwell Lake, Chief of the Naval Staff**





Drinking milk on the wharf, Wellington, July 1942

**Drinking milk on the wharf, Wellington, June 1942**

Marines marching to their camp near McKay's Crossing, Paekakariki, July 1942



***UNITED STATES MARINES IN NEW ZEALAND***

**Marines marching to their camp near McKay's Crossing, Paekariki, July 1942**



The Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser is welcomed at Washington  
*Left to right:* Lord Halifax, British Ambassador to the United States;  
Brigadier-General Patrick Hurley, United States Minister to New  
Zealand; Hon. Walter Nash, New Zealand Minister to the United  
States; Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser; and Mr Cordell Hull, Secretary of State

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Rt. Hon. J. G. Coates.



**Rt. Hon. J. G. Coates**

Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard  
Freyberg and Mr S. G. Holland at  
Divisional Headquarters in Italy,  
April 1945



**Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg and Mr S. G. Holland at Divisional Headquarters in Italy, April 1945**



Hudsons of No. 3 Squadron leaving Whenuapai in the early morning  
for the forward area, October 1942

**Hudsons of No. 3 Squadron leaving Whenuapai in the early morning for the forward area, October 1942**



Mud in the Kaimai Ranges – 3 Division manoeuvres in New Zealand

Thus did the arguments interlock; and the evolution of opinion in the Labour Party left no doubt that they would be accepted. There was, however, a week or two of confusion after the conference, in which the problems of defence were discussed by the Prime Minister in statements which must have caused torment to his advisers, and which are interesting as showing the lingering resistance even at this stage to traditional forms of defence. First he was reported as having said that ‘My aim is a home defence force of at least 50,000 men, independent of overseas sources for arms, ammunition and other essentials’. <sup>1</sup> When there was some newspaper discussion of the provision of uniforms for these men, Mr Savage replied sharply that the Government had not been talking about 50,000 Territorials. ‘It has talked about a citizen army in which men would not be dressed up in uniform, but could go about their business feeling that they were citizens and soldiers at the same time, not goose-stepping up and down the country in uniform and spending hundreds of thousands a year in doing the job’. <sup>2</sup> Needless to say, these amorphous proposals came to nothing. The Prime Minister was doubtless feeling his way, and reaching that personal conviction which was a major factor in preparing New Zealand for the crisis. The Government's policy when announced on 22 May was as recommended by the Defence Conference—that is, the enrolment of 6000 more Territorials. To supplement them, all able-bodied men were called upon to enrol in the National Military Reserve. This force had been established in the

<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 Apr 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 4 May 1939.

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October and had been confined to ex-servicemen—out of those now enrolling it was proposed that 5000 with previous military experience would be called up in the event of a national emergency. <sup>1</sup>

Once the policy had been determined, there was nothing maladroit about Mr Savage's appeal for recruits. He spoke indeed from a position of unique personal strength. The very cloudiness of his past thoughts on the subject cleared him from any suspicion of militarism—his conception of defence had always been based on that of a population who could be relied upon to do the decent thing because of their basic goodness of heart and because Labour's social programme had removed the source of evil. With this programme he was popularly identified. A successful radio personality had convinced countless New Zealanders of his manifest kindness and faith in humanity.

It would be hard to imagine a better equipped recruiting agent for the New Zealand of 1939, and on 22 May his campaign was launched in a series of national broadcasts. As long-term policy, said the Prime Minister, 'Let us in God's name do all that we can to restore the reign of sanity, good faith and law.' Yet in the world as it is, good will must be matched by powerful and skilful selfhelp. Some say, he hinted, that the militarism of dictators must be matched by a like militarism and dictatorship in their opponents: 'I say with profound conviction that democracy can be trusted to do, and to do freely and quickly, what is necessary for its self-preservation'. Therefore he called confidently for volunteers: the Government could supply weapons, but the people must supply the men to use them. No fear of being sent abroad on half-known causes need deter volunteers: the training was 'for home defence, that

is, the defence of New Zealand in New Zealand. It is with a view to repelling attacks against our own shores that I ask them to prepare themselves. I am not asking them to go to war, but to be prepared if war comes to them.' By joining one of the defence forces, said Mr Savage, they would be helping themselves and helping **Britain**; and they would surely find in their association for national defence the same kind of social satisfaction that they drew from their association in sport and in civilian bodies of all kinds; incidentally, there was a promise that the normal Saturday's sport would not be interfered with by military duties. If the overseas menace passed without the war which all feared, 'they will still be able to say that they had a certain organisation, an appreciation of each other's requirements and of the development of the idea of service. There is nothing bigger on this earth. It teaches men

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 23 May 1939.

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how little they can do single handed and how much they can do united <sup>1</sup>.'

The recruiting rate immediately increased: in June, 1550 men joined the Territorials, as compared with an average of 530 in the three months February-April. Yet to some the flow seemed pitifully slow, and there was a renewed demand for compulsory military training. A resolution advocating it was passed at the NZRSA Conference on 22 June, and a few days later when the Address-in-Reply debate opened the Opposition took a much more definite line on the matter than it had in the past. Colonel Hargest said that 'We stand for universal military training for home defence, and we consider that if citizens desire to enjoy all the rights and privileges of a British democracy they should be prepared to do their share towards defending them'. <sup>2</sup> Most other opposition members spoke strongly in favour of compulsory service. However, the Government still stood firmly against peacetime conscription. Labour tradition was strongly against it, and the idea was repugnant even to those who could contemplate the possibility of



compulsion in times of war. This, it seems clear, was already the position of Savage and of Peter Fraser, who was to succeed him as Prime Minister in 1940; when the nation had its back to the wall, suggested Savage in mid-1938, compulsion may prove necessary, but 'we will not begin with human flesh and blood' or allow some men to profiteer while others are dying.<sup>3</sup> That conscription of wealth would precede conscription of manpower became the stock formula of Labour speakers whenever the latter problem had to be discussed.

In the meantime, however, it is doubtful if, even if they had wished, the members of cabinet could have carried the Labour movement with them on compulsory military training. If diehard opponents of conscription had been added to critics who complained that cabinet's financial policy was too conservative, the position of the party leadership might have become precarious. Voluntary recruiting continued, therefore. In the last three months of peace over 6000 men enlisted in the Territorials, the roll of whom at the end of August stood at nearly 17,000. In addition roughly 10,000 men with military training had volunteered for the National Military Reserve.

Last-minute conversion to the need for strengthening the Army was paralleled to some small extent in other and less publicised matters. In particular, brisk work was tardily done to fill a serious gap in New Zealand's preparations: that of the linkage between the

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<sup>1</sup> *Press*, 31 May 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 254, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 3 Jun 1938.

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three armed services, and between all of them and the civilian organisation of the country. This matter had a long history, for those who grasped the existence of the problem were few in number and

**argued a politically unattractive case. Yet there were not lacking among service chiefs those who realised that modern warfare would clearly demand, sooner or later, the redirection of the country's whole economic effort. The adjustment from peace to war could not be left to chance even in so small a community as New Zealand. Someone had to hold the balance among the armed services, and between them and civilian life, and New Zealand's efforts as a whole had to be integrated with those of her overseas associates. Moreover, detailed planning was essential as well as decision on broad questions of policy: and policy-making, if it were to be better than improvisation, must build on intimate knowledge of existing facts and possibilities in New Zealand as well as on an understanding of the needs of world strategy.**

**Ultimately the responsibility in such fields must rest on cabinet, and particularly on the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the lessons of the First World War showed clearly the need for planning ahead of urgent need and the utility of well organised professional institutions to guide statesmen through problems impossibly complex for last-minute study.**

**Such lines of thought demanded a departure from New Zealand's general tradition, namely, that a few key men should know everything and give decisions without interference by specialists. They demanded, too, that something more systematic than personal contacts between individuals should integrate the work of the different branches of the armed services, and plan defence in terms of civilian as well as of military organisation. Overseas models were, in fact, not lacking. Some institution was needed on the model of the British Committee of Imperial Defence to link together the research and policy-forming work of politicians, servicemen and civilian departments, and to assure that when action was needed, it could be taken promptly. The Committee of Imperial Defence was, of course, an active body in **Britain** during the years before 1914. It was a group of interlocking committees, covering all departments that would be concerned with the outbreak of war, but crowned by a small 'Prime Minister's Committee' which could ensure effective action. In such a body the transition from peace to war could**



be organised as a national problem; and mere prudence dictated that every department should know its function in any crisis and have confidence that the government machine as a whole was proceeding according to a coherent plan, and dealing with contingencies that had been foreseen. One of the major functions of the Committee of Imperial Defence was, therefore, to compile and keep up to date the overall plan, embodied in a complex set of documents which came to be known as the 'War Book'.

The Imperial Conference of 1911 had recognised the need for some such body in every dominion; but action lagged. In 1920 an effort was made in New Zealand to organise an advisory committee, and it met once. In 1928 the British Government told the Dominions that its own War Book was complete, and sent out a description of it and of the work of the Committee of Imperial Defence, in the hope that this would be of value to those drafting the Dominions' War Books. It also raised the whole question of imperial defence, the function of the CID and the need for defence committees in the Dominions. The New Zealand Minister of Defence, T. M. Wilford, discussed the matter with his service chiefs, and memoranda were drafted for the Prime Minister adapting British practice to New Zealand conditions. But then the suggestion lapsed, and was lost to sight under the waves of economic depression, in spite of awkward reminders from **London** that something should be done about a New Zealand War Book. At the Imperial Conference of 1930, for example, it appeared that **Australia**, **Canada**, South Africa and **India** had made considerable progress, but New Zealand had achieved nothing. The advent of **Hitler** at length gave new stimulus: in February 1933 the Prime Minister said that the War Book should be pushed ahead; and, after considerable service prompting, announced in October his decision to form a New Zealand section of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

It met for the first time on 15 November 1933 and was addressed by three cabinet ministers; and a series of sub-committees got promptly to work. Yet the way remained hard. Outside of a few keen servicemen, of whom Major W. G. Stevens became secretary, there was little

appreciation of the magnitude of the task in hand. An under-staffed Prime Minister's Department and cabinet secretariat could not undertake their natural function of administering the new co-ordinating committee. Army officers who acted as secretaries to sub-committees were distracted by other duties. Moreover, the structure was incomplete; the New Zealand Committee of Imperial Defence was essentially an affair of officials, civilian and military. It lacked the Prime Minister's committee of British precedent, the direct link with cabinet which would have given both leadership and the prospect of action. As it was, cabinet ministers could find no time to consider CID papers, let alone press forward its work which, in cautious official phraseology, 'proceeded with no great enthusiasm or result till November 1935'. An impasse had been reached, with preparatory work piling up and the bridges to link up government departments still unbuilt.

Towards the end of 1935 the Committee itself worked out plans to make action at last effective. The key man must be the Prime Minister, in whose office an adequate secretariat should be lodged and to whom the organisation—soon to be re-christened the **Organisation for National Security**—should have direct access. The group of sub-committees working on specific problems should be crowned, as in **Britain**, by a Prime Minister's committee attended by 'appropriate ministers and the Heads of the Fighting Services.' A senior civil servant should be sent to the Imperial Defence College and given experience of the British Committee of Imperial Defence, and then appointed secretary to the New Zealand organisation with status as Assistant Secretary to the Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department. This scheme was recommended to Cabinet on 20 December 1935, just after the change of government, with reminders in March and August of the following year.

It was late in the day for such a gap in effective planning to be tolerated; and in March 1937, with nothing yet achieved, the matter was taken up again by uneasy servicemen. Paymaster Commander E. L. Tottenham, as Naval Secretary, had long been fighting for a more efficient organisation at headquarters; and the Chiefs of Staff now asked

with some emphasis for a Council of Defence composed of the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Chiefs of Staffs of the three services, and such other persons as the Prime Minister might appoint. Here was a Prime Minister's committee on the British model, strong enough to co-ordinate the policy of the defence departments and to direct the work of the sub-committees of the **Organisation for National Security**—work involving almost all government departments. It could keep contact with parallel bodies in **Britain** and other dominions, and should be served by a secretariat in close contact with the Prime Minister's Department. It was planned as an advisory body, which would propose action to cabinet: a means of focusing expert advice, so that politically responsible action could be prompt and well informed.

The general scheme was at last approved, and in May 1937 the Council of Defence was created. Major Stevens was accordingly established within the Prime Minister's Department with the triple function of Secretary to the **Organisation for National Security**, to the Council of Defence, and to the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee. The means were thus formally provided by which the planning of New Zealand's war effort, military and civil, could be studied in a systematic way through sub-committees, their reports co-ordinated, and recommendations placed before Cabinet in a form suitable for quick decision.

Whether actual achievement was greatly hastened is another matter. Even after **Munich** the Chiefs of Staff complained that Cabinet was dilatory in giving decisions on their recommendations, and as late as August 1939 the Manpower Committee could not go ahead because it had had no 'indication of the Government's view of manpower problems in war'. Nor was the necessary administrative machine built up with any sense of urgency. Within ONS itself all depended on one man, Major Stevens, for a year or more, both for the organisation of committee work and the drafting of reports. It was only in the course of 1938 that the secretarial work of various committees was gradually taken over by the departments likely to be most concerned, and it was not till September 1938, the month of **Munich**, that the ONS got a civilian Assistant

**Secretary.**

**Ill provided as it was, the ONS grappled manfully with problems of central planning, aided by recurrent crises in Europe. In September 1938, it seemed, an effective beginning had scarcely been made in the War Book which would guide every department through the transition to a state of war; in that month, wrote Stevens, ONS 'achieved more ... than in the previous three and a half years of its history'; 'during the crisis all departments were most helpful and the work advanced rapidly'. With relaxed tension, however, pressure still was necessary to finalise details and ensure revision; as late as 12 June 1939 it was still necessary for the Prime Minister to ask all departments concerned to have their sections of the book complete by the end of July. As tested in the outcome, the work was well done, and just in time.**

**Other aspects of the work depended on factors harder to control. No efforts made in New Zealand in 1939 could significantly increase the equipment available for the armed forces, nor, short of conscription, produce a wholly adequate number of recruits. From time to time, for example, there was talk of producing military equipment locally, and in April the Defence Conference recommended that New Zealand's capacity to make military equipment should be explored. The New Zealand delegation 'pointed out that if any armament production capacity were to be inaugurated in New Zealand its creation must depend upon the provision of basic industries such as [an] iron and steel industry'. This cautious pomposity did not conceal the fact that nothing whatever could be done beyond the frantic, ingenious improvisation which in wartime did enable New Zealand industry to do useful work with existing resources. There was a certain industrial development in New Zealand between 1935 and 1939. It is, of course, debatable whether much of this was due to direct government action, except in so far as public policy was responsible for a general inflationary movement, and for the system of import control imposed in 1938. Cabinet was, however, conscious of the relevance of industrial activity to warfare. Thus Mr Savage said in March 1939, '...it is our bounden duty to prepare for the worst, not only**

**in defence along ordinary lines, but in industrial development upon which the defence of the country will largely depend <sup>1</sup>.'**

**So far as manpower was concerned, difficulties were not economic but political. By common consent, a national register was the essential foundation for any intelligent planning, and on 25 January 1939 the relevant ONS committee pressed cabinet for the compilation of a compulsory register of the country's manpower, and failing that a voluntary register—'The Committee desire to put forward the view that the only method which allows time for planning ahead and for obviating confusion is a compulsory register in peace; but it must be made clear that this almost inevitably leads on to full compulsory control from the outset of the war'. Here lay the crux of the matter. The unwillingness of cabinet to treat conscription as anything more than a remote possibility has already been noted, and despite the efforts of the committee the decision to compile a register was not taken until after the outbreak of war.**

**A further difficulty impeding action lay in the official estimate of the shape likely to be taken by the approaching crisis. Nothing effective could be done against a full-scale Japanese attack, but short of this there was reason to fear a war on two fronts, in which New Zealand would be isolated. Logic dictated, therefore, preparations to deal with an indefinite interruption in supplies, and with a huge accumulation of perishable produce in New Zealand. A good deal was actually done to build up reserves, in spite of acute shortage of overseas funds. Not only did manufacturers build up their own stocks of key materials with the encouragement and, in some cases, the financial assistance of the Government, but reserves of certain commodities were purchased and stored by government departments. For instance, £42,000 worth of tinplate together with small quantities of tin and lead were stored by the Public Works Department against a possible [United Kingdom](#) order for tinned foodstuffs. So far as New Zealand's own perishable produce was concerned, little was in fact achieved. In July 1939 the Supply Committee of the ONS had approved a recommendation from one of its**

subcommittees urging that meat companies be compelled to increase their refrigerated space and that the Government itself should import equipment to enable still further increases to be made. No further action, however, seems to have been taken on the proposal before war broke out—nor, with **Japan** temporarily neutral, did it prove to have been necessary. Any tardiness shown here was justified by the event; and though it might have been ideally desirable to make preparations against this and other hypothetical dangers, the

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<sup>1</sup> **Auckland Star**, 22 Mar 1939.

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arguments against making them—particularly when as in this case they involved a drain upon scarce overseas funds—are obvious enough.

In the upshot, New Zealand entered the war better prepared, psychologically, technically and administratively, than might have been anticipated in view of her far from warlike past. Fortune favoured: the war against **Japan**, against which she could not have armed herself or her economy, was postponed till, with American help, it could in fact be faced. For the war as it actually evolved, the channels of her co-operation had been clearly marked out as regards Army, Navy and Air Force alike. The men were there, untrained it is true, but eager; and the machinery, military and administrative, was there, much of it built at the eleventh hour and untried but ready for use. To have done much more—for example to have raised and trained an expeditionary force and to have had it ready for export on 3 September 1939—would have been politically impossible. It would also have been of doubtful strategic wisdom in view of New Zealand's situation and of the professional advice received. New Zealand moved into line slowly, reluctantly, and in response to irresistible pressure; but for the particular task in hand she was not ill-equipped.

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 8 – EXPLOSION



## CHAPTER 8

### *Explosion*

ON 19 September 1922, H. A. L. Fisher cast round in his well-stored mind to find examples of extreme political improbability, and he asked of the foreigners assembled at Geneva the rhetorical question: what would be the attitude of New Zealand if asked to fight because a threat to the eastern frontier of **Poland** involved Great Britain through a treaty of mutual guarantee? The answer was to Fisher and his audience so obvious that it was a conclusive argument against **Britain** entering into any such treaty without the most careful study and forethought. <sup>1</sup> Nevertheless when New Zealand first declared war it was in fulfilment of a guarantee not very different from that imagined by Fisher, though entered into under conditions the reverse of those which he said were indispensable. The guarantee to **Poland** meant the abandonment of established policies. It was given in haste to meet an emergency, an improvisation on the part of disillusioned and indignant men which formed no part of 'a coherent plan of action <sup>2</sup>.' The objections which Fisher envisaged in 1922 as being too obvious to need mention were completely ignored, both when the guarantee was given in March and when it was honoured in September 1939. It would, in fact, have been hard to devise a more challenging issue for those in New Zealand inclined to favour isolation, or even caution in accepting risks originating in the Old World. Yet her involvement in eastern **Europe** was quietly accepted by a government which had pushed its claim for independence in policy-making beyond the point of embarrassment to fellow members of the Commonwealth.

The policy, later stigmatised as 'appeasement', which culminated in the **Munich** agreement of September 1938, but which was sustained till after the extinction of **Czechoslovakia** in March 1939, had some fair claim to be considered an agreed policy of the British Commonwealth. Even New Zealand with her general firm support of collective security did not oppose the appeasement of **Germany** as decisively as she did that of **Italy**. The prolonged crises of **Abyssinia** and **Spain** not only permitted

policy to be formulated:

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<sup>1</sup> *Procès verbaux de la troisième Commission, Troisième Assemblée, 19 Sep 1922.*

<sup>2</sup> *Times Literary Supplement, 14 Sep 1951, p. 574.*

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their circumstances made of the League a forum in which small countries had opportunity, and even encouragement, to express themselves. In **Hitler's** case, however, his victims submitted quickly, immediate practical obstacles to effective action seemed insuperable, and the circumstances provided neither constitutional occasions nor convenient opportunity for serious debate within the **League of Nations**. Moreover, the leaders of the New Zealand Labour movement had long held the view, widely spread in the English-speaking world, that **Germany** had been badly treated at **Versailles**, and tended to apply, to the benefit even of Nazis, its basic axiom that men behave decently when well and generously treated.

For all their clarity as to the means proper to be adopted for the remedy of grievances, therefore, Mr Savage's cabinet was disposed to link with firmness of principle a willingness to contemplate peaceful change. His personal attitude was expressed at the 1937 Imperial Conference when he blamed the British Government for its acquiescence in German acts of lawlessness, but also laid stress on the necessity for rectifying legitimate German grievances. He suggested a world conference which 'would review the Treaty of **Versailles** and all its works and would give **Germany** a new start'. What he had in mind seemed to be not so much a territorial redistribution as an effort to improve **Germany's** economic position. He did not completely exclude the restoration of **Western Samoa** to **Germany** as part of such a general settlement but pointed out that the welfare of the native inhabitants must be the primary consideration.

There were, of course, clearer heads than Savage's at work, and the

German-New Zealand Trade Agreement of September 1937 emerged from considerations of practical advantage rather than from vague idealism. It was, in fact, practical considerations which determined New Zealand's uneasy acquiescence in the last moves of the Czechoslovak crisis. When Chamberlain on 28 September 1938 dramatically announced his decision to fly to **Munich**, the New Zealand cabinet asked that he 'be informed that they most earnestly support his continued and determined efforts for the peace of **Europe** and the world which they sincerely trust will be crowned with success <sup>1</sup>.' Cabinet declined, however, to join in the chorus of praise for 'peace in our time'; in expressing their relief when the Munich Agreement was concluded, they remarked that they 'earnestly trust that the basis of settlement is such as will prove to be a lasting safeguard of world peace, founded on justice and order between nations <sup>2</sup>.' The New Zealand Government may very

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<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSDA, 19 Sep 1938.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 30 Sep 1938.

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well have felt that the obvious choice in September 1938 lay between appeasement and an immediate war of the first magnitude. To chide the British Government for choosing the first alternative would have been a very different thing from arguing that **Britain** should not have steered so very clear of the relatively small risk of hostilities with **Italy** in 1936.

In short, there is reason to think that the New Zealand cabinet disapproved of the British Government's conciliatory policy; but its attitude was not publicly defined. To that extent the Dominion was associated with that policy, and after **Munich** assumed, like everyone else, that it would be continued. The Munich settlement had, in fact, strengthened a consideration already powerful: the sheer strategic impossibility of resisting an eastward move by **Germany**. This had been acknowledged by Eden to the 1937 Imperial Conference. Six months

before **Munich**, with the Czech army intact and well equipped, the British ambassador in Prague—and the British Prime Minister in discussions with the French—had insisted that the Western Powers could not protect their friends in eastern **Europe**; the threat of war from the west could only be a bluff, because if fighting once began Bohemia must be submerged. The utmost that **Britain** and **France** could do would be to reconstitute **Czechoslovakia** when they had beaten **Germany**.<sup>1</sup> In January 1939 the British Chargè d'Affaires in **Berlin** wrote plainly that **Britain** could not guarantee the *status quo* in central and eastern **Europe**, but that she could keep out of the coming war by squarely facing this fact, and by cultivating good relations with the more moderate Nazis.<sup>2</sup> The implication was plain, and it was drawn by the German ambassador in **London** in January 1939. Of 'authoritative circles' there, he wrote that 'It can be assumed that, in accordance with the basic trend of Chamberlain's policy they will accept a German expansionist policy in Eastern Europe<sup>3</sup>.' Chamberlain himself gave a friendly response to **Hitler's** speech of 30 January 1939, which hinted broadly enough at this assumption.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that established British policy stood the first shock of **Germany's** extinction of **Czechoslovakia** on 15 March. Chamberlain's own first comment was cautious, with the suggestion that it was only the method employed that was at fault. New Zealand press comment on the whole followed the same line: after **Munich** the remnants of the Czech state were at the mercy of **Germany**, and her action, although deplorable, was not altogether surprising and made no fundamental change in the European situation. The pressure of the following

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-39, Third Series, Vol. I, pp. 55, 85.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 563.

fortnight was, however, to reverse completely the pattern of British policy.

This was in part due to the impression created by **Hitler**, perhaps misleadingly, that he intended a further immediate drive eastwards. After occupying Bohemia and Moravia the Germans launched a 'psychological offensive' which constantly shifted its direction from one part of eastern **Europe** to another. On 22 March Lithuania accepted a German ultimatum and ceded Memel, on the following day **Germany** proclaimed a protectorate over **Slovakia**, and **Rumania**—under pressure—signed a trade agreement with **Germany**. Above all, German pressure against **Poland** steadily increased and by the time the British guarantee to **Poland** was decided upon Cabinet did not know, Chamberlain said later, that ' **Poland** might not be invaded within a term which could be measured by hours and not by days <sup>1</sup>.' All this had its effect not only directly on the feelings of members of the Government but indirectly through its impact on British opinion, notably in the Conservative Party. On 28 March thirty-four government supporters tabled a motion urging the formation of a national government.

In blunt general terms, many men judged that the time had come to call a halt to **Hitler**, and therefore to take a stand beside his next prospective victim. Yet such reactions had an emotional, even a quixotic, quality of a kind unlikely in themselves to lead a responsible government to reverse a well established and logically defensible attitude. In particular, they provided no answer to the obvious question: how could British or French forces operate in eastern **Europe**? In this case, however, there was a powerful underlying apprehension of a more immediate and less romantic kind. On 25 January 1939 the British Government told the **New Zealand Government** of its fear that **Hitler** was 'considering an attack on Western Powers as a preliminary to subsequent

action in the east <sup>2</sup>.' This estimate that **Hitler** was bent on an early war with the Western Powers seems to have prevailed first with Lord Halifax and then with the rest of the British cabinet in the critical days of late March.

At the end of March 1939 the British Government evidently saw two alternative dangers developing in eastern **Europe**. The first was that **Poland** would be quickly eliminated, as a political force,

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, Vol. 351, cols. 1876–7.

<sup>2</sup> This cable was along the same lines as a message from Viscount Halifax to the Embassy in **Washington** on 24 January 1939, printed on pp. 4–6 of *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, Third Series, Vol. IV. Documents released since the war suggest that, at the time the guarantee to **Poland** was given, **Hitler** did in fact intend to attack first in the west rather than the east, and in particular had then no firm plans for military attack on **Poland**; but the attack on the west was not scheduled to take place for some years.—Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, p. 344. See in particular de Mendelssohn, *The Nuremberg Documents* pp. 99, 100, 120, 140–1; also Hinsley, *Hitler's Strategy*, p. 2.

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either by a lightning military attack, or by being subjected to such pressure that she would submit promptly to German political and economic demands. On 28 March the British Government told the **New Zealand Government** that it thought **Germany's** purpose was gradually to neutralise the countries of central and eastern **Europe**, to 'deprive them of their power to resist and to incorporate them in the German economic system. When this has been done, the way will have been prepared for an attack on Western European powers'. The second danger apprehended in **London** was of a more urgent kind: that, in spite of past fulminations against Bolshevism and profession of friendship with the West, **Hitler's** military programme was to attack westwards before striking at **Russia**—an apprehension which struck at the vague hope among some

Westerners that Nazism and Bolshevism would become deadlocked in exhausting strife and so leave them in peace. <sup>1</sup> While it remains doubtful whether Chamberlain's cabinet would have gone to war in the hope of preventing progressive German domination of eastern **Europe**, a different emphasis emerged with the possibility that a military blow westwards came first on the timetable. To the layman's argument that **Britain** should stand with **Hitler's** next victim, there was added the urgent wish to be sure that the West, if attacked, would have help in the East.

These two differing reasons for an immediate guarantee to **Poland** were apparently reinforced by personal influences of a kind comparatively rarely felt in British foreign policy. It seems likely that the arguments for a pessimistic interpretation of **Hitler's** intentions were strengthened in the mind of Lord Halifax by reaction against the sordid character of the **Munich** settlement, and given overwhelming weight with Chamberlain by indignation at the brazenness of German policy in the days after the middle of March, and its repeated failure to respond to his personal gestures of good will and confidence. These reactions at government level were swiftly reinforced by a sweeping revulsion of British public opinion against the **Munich** policy and its sequels. Decisive action was determined upon in circumstances more creditable to the emotional than the intellectual soundness of British leadership.

Reports concerning British cabinet opinion were faithfully cabled to the **New Zealand Government**, and information as to British public reaction filled the press. In neither case could the full emotional flavour be conveyed, nor could New Zealand's own reaction, at cabinet level or in the public mind, have a comparable character. It should be noted, however, that after **Hitler's** occupation of Prague the proposed commitment to **Poland** was not

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Salvemini, *Prelude to World War II*, p. 509 and *passim*.

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accepted automatically, or without the formulation of some at least



of the arguments against it. The *Christchurch Press*, for example, remarked on 22 March that 'It would be a tragic and indeed an intolerable irony, if having abandoned **Czechoslovakia** to her fate because she was unwilling to involve herself more deeply in European commitments, **Britain** should be induced by a panic "stop **Hitler**" movement to guarantee the frontiers of **Poland**, a country which has no ethnic or strategic unity and has in the brief period of its resurrection distinguished itself by the corruption of its political system, by its abominable treatment of minorities, and by the dishonesty and opportunism of its foreign policy'. On the following day the *Auckland Star* wrote that 'There is talk of **Britain** making a "common front"—with **Russia**, the most ruthless dictatorship in the world; with **Poland**, another dictatorship, holding down by force enough minorities to make **Herr Hitler's** mouth water; with **Rumania** and other **Balkan** nations, all opportunist by necessity and training. What stability could be hoped for from such a front: What would be its purpose? To break a dictatorship in **Berlin** and strengthen another in **Moscow**?' This vigorous journalism was no doubt written for citizens who were conscious that their fate was being determined, and were uneasy at the trend of events.

The Government had more responsibility, though not much more knowledge, and little freedom of manoeuvre. The complexity of the situation and the speed of developments gave small opportunity for constructive comment from overseas, and as was to happen so often throughout the wartime period, New Zealand merely reiterated and stood by the policies established in the last years of peace. On 21 March a message to the British Government suggested that a conference be called of 'as many nations as may wish to defend the principles of international decency or their own integrity.' It concluded with a pledge that the Government and people of the Dominion would 'play their full part should the occasion unhappily arise, in defence of the right against the brutalities and the naked power politics of aggressor states, and in defence of the decencies of international life and the traditions upon which the British Commonwealth had been built.' In a press statement two days later Savage reaffirmed that 'New Zealand would be found



wherever **Britain** was when **Britain** was in trouble' and remarked that 'There were some people in New Zealand who seemed to know just what should be done, but he thought it likely that those on the spot would have the best knowledge, certainly better than those 12,000 miles away.' Savage had, for the moment, come to a position not so very different from that for which he had so sharply criticised Forbes in 1935. New Zealand's criticism of appeasement had been made at an earlier stage and had no doubt played its very small part in building up the reaction against it in British opinion that was now reaching its climax. But, as the issue revealed itself not as one of how best to prevent a war but how to secure the most favourable conditions to fight it when it came, those who had hoped that war could be avoided by a system of collective security were left with their own adjustments to make.

When the British Government on 31 March announced its guarantee to **Poland**, there were good reasons why it should be accepted without demur both by the **New Zealand Government** and by public opinion. The 'firm line' against aggression which New Zealand had advocated in the past had at last been taken, and with a unity of opinion in England that had not been paralleled for many years. To New Zealanders, as to Englishmen, the fact that such a lover of peace as Neville Chamberlain had been driven to take such a step was a proof that there were in favour of it arguments of overwhelming cogency. Moreover, the optimistic tone of newspaper reports about Anglo-Russian relations created a general impression that the front against **Hitler** would soon be strengthened by the addition of **Russia**. Even the small Communist party, which sometimes struck a discordant note, supported the guarantee 'to the extent that it is genuine'. <sup>1</sup>

For New Zealand, as for the Western world as a whole, the die was cast on 31 March. Technically, she was not a party either to the initial temporary and conditional guarantee, or to the full Treaty of Mutual Assistance, but she was committed up to the hilt, both by the decisions of her government and by the attitude of her people. If **Hitler** chose to

strike either westward or eastward New Zealand was pledged to fight. We now know that it was only three days after the guarantee that he made his choice. On 3 April he gave instructions for preparations to begin so that an attack on **Poland** could be made at any time from 1 September onwards, <sup>2</sup> and on 17 April the Russians opened with **Germany** the negotiations that were to culminate in the Non-Aggression Pact of 23 August. <sup>3</sup> Thereafter the critical decisions controlling New Zealand's immediate future were made in **Berlin** and **Moscow**, not in **London**, and this situation had been created by her own leaders' responsible actions, based in turn on the realities of New Zealand life. Events of 1939 could be taken relatively calmly because the only decisions about which doubt was possible had been made freely and openly and with public acquiescence in the years of peace.

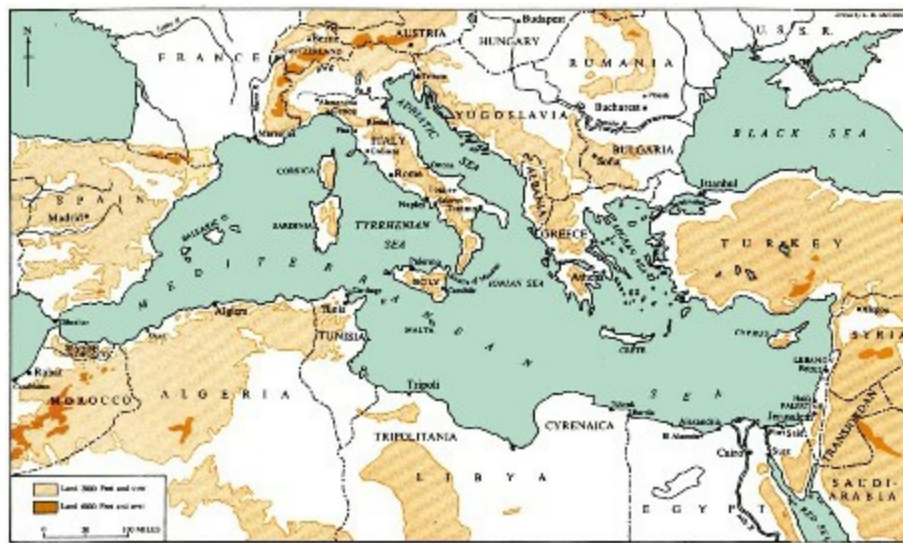
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<sup>1</sup> *People's Voice*, 14 Apr 1939.

<sup>2</sup> de Mendelssohn, *The Nuremberg Documents*, p. 100;  
*Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D, Vol. VI, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> See United States State Department *Nazi-Soviet Relations*.

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The Mediterranean Theatre  
**The Mediterranean Theatre**

The course was set, and New Zealand politics subsided into their normal preoccupation with domestic and economic issues. The ONS, however, drafted its plans, the Prime Minister campaigned for recruits, and cables arrived from **London** describing the efforts to arrive at an understanding with **Russia**. New Zealand was informed step by step of these complex negotiations but as far as the records go her comment was confined to one despatch. On 12 May it was cabled to **London** that the **New Zealand Government** 'fully realise that His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** are much nearer to the problem and more intimately affected by possible results, than are His Majesty's Government in New Zealand, but they would regard it as deplorable if Russian assistance in the prevention of aggression were not secured and in their view no reasonable opportunity should be lost of obtaining Russian collaboration in this essential policy.' On 28 August New Zealand expressly approved of the British decision to tell **Hitler** that the Polish guarantee would be honoured in spite of the Russo-German pact. An overwhelming pressure of events had converted into a formality the decision to go to war that was made by the New Zealand cabinet just before midnight on 3 September 1939.

The immediate problem which followed cabinet's capital decision was technical, namely the transition from peace to war, involving alike the assumption by the State of the stronger powers necessary to wartime administration, and the readiness of armed forces and civilian departments to undertake their new tasks. The first moves were made, as planned, on 1 and 2 September: the 'precautionary stage' was adopted and a group of ten emergency regulations took the essential preliminary steps in relation to censorship, the armed forces, and the prevention of profiteering. Then, in the early hours of Monday morning, 4 September, the ONS and its associates had the strenuous, but rather satisfying, task of operating the newly finished War Book.

Under test the machine worked well. There were enough loose ends to provide a moral for the future: contingencies inadequately provided for on the one hand, and on the other, the inveterate tendency of

**Ministers and departments to work independently of one another and to appeal direct to cabinet, thus imperilling a hard-won co-ordination. The remedy, wrote Colonel Stevens,<sup>1</sup> was indicated in the experience of the past ten days. All measures relating to the war must pass through a single office and cabinet procedure (or the procedure of the 'War Cabinet when set up') should be strengthened so that departments would receive co-ordinated 'directives'. Meanwhile, however, the activity of the**

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**<sup>1</sup> Stevens to Berendsen, 4 Sep 1939. Stevens had been promoted lieutenant-colonel on 1 Nov 1937.**

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**ordinating**

**office was certified in the flow of detailed emergency regulations. Between 1 and 11 September, thirty-four of such regulations were issued under the authority of a depression-time law, the Public Safety Conservation Act 1932. The procedure was then regularised under the Emergency Regulations Act 1939, under which a further thirty-four regulations were issued before the end of the year. These constituted a body of legislation which was in the main both well digested and comprehensive, and which enabled New Zealand to go to war with surprisingly little dislocation of her normal living. Moreover, the reservoir of authority thus created was evidently limitless. So long as there continued to be an overwhelming consensus of opinion in favour of waging war, under state direction, with all available weapons, a determined government would have no difficulty in exercising the most extensive powers with full legality.**

**The main contingency not directly provided for in the War Book was a war in which it was possible to send an expeditionary force overseas. Nevertheless, the Army had always thought in terms of this possibility. Public sentiment and the adventurousness of youth both stressed this form of co-operation, and Peter Fraser's sober remark that in such a conflict as that in prospect it might be of more value to the common**

cause to maintain farm production than to provide fighting men was out of key with the times. <sup>1</sup> On 5 September the Council of Defence took the decisive step, and recommended that a 'special force' should be raised of men volunteering to serve in any part of the world. The advice was accepted, and the plan announced as government policy on 8 September. Overseas service was not mentioned, but everyone knew it was in mind. Enlistment was for the duration of the war and twelve months thereafter. Recruiting for the first batch of 6600 men began on 12 September, and within a week almost 12,000 men had volunteered. The prophecies of older men, that given a chance young New Zealanders would flock to serve overseas, were fulfilled; and the problem was clearly not so much to find the men as to train and equip them and transport them to some scene of effective action.

To the task of training them, the Army applied its rather inadequate resources: the story is told in another volume in this series. In brief, an expeditionary force was in fact trained and despatched in rough conformity with the timetable which for many years had been agreed upon among service officers and made known to **London**. If combat troops were desired, and the government of the day approved, it had been understood that about a third of an expeditionary force would be available within three months, and

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<sup>1</sup> *NZP D* Vol. 256. p. 155 on 15 Sep 1939.

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a whole division within twelve months of the outbreak of war. All would depend, however, on the availability of equipment, which was a factor at this stage within British rather than New Zealand control. Until 1936, and probably much longer, equipment held in New Zealand was based on the needs of the first echelon (or about one-third) of an expeditionary force. In the event, the First Echelon was ready for despatch in December 1939, though still requiring further training before combat. The Third Echelon was despatched in August 1940, though likewise only partially trained. The Expeditionary Force was

recruited without reducing the numbers of Territorials seriously below the divisional strength envisaged in April 1939; <sup>1</sup> but New Zealand was denuded of trained men. <sup>2</sup>

In short, so far as New Zealand's domestic arrangements were concerned, a complete reversal of military policy was quickly and easily achieved; though the Prime Minister's private thoughts on the matter will never be known. New Zealand, it was understood, would continue to defend her own shores, and to send overseas the relatively small flow of specialised trainees for Navy and Air Force, on whom stress had previously been laid; but in addition she offered a large expeditionary force on the pattern of the First World War.

The offer was formally made on 13 September, <sup>3</sup> but was conditional on the attitude of **Japan**, on the availability of shipping and protection for convoys, and on the likelihood that New Zealand troops could, in fact, be useful in the common cause. These matters were considered carefully at a **London** gathering of Commonwealth ministers and their advisers in October and November 1939. On the attitude of **Japan**, information in **London** was reassuring. Lord Halifax, quoting a despatch from his ambassador in **Washington**, set out the reasons why **Japan** was unlikely to move southwards in the near future. Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, reached the same conclusion on naval grounds, but assured the conference that, if the unlikely should happen, **Britain** would give almost top priority to protecting her southern dominions: 'if the choice were presented of defending them against a serious attack or sacrificing British interests in the **Mediterranean**, our duty to our kith and kin would prevail.' His conclusion was clear: there were no naval reasons to prevent the despatch of Australian and New Zealand armies to 'decisive battlefields'.

The Australians remained somewhat sceptical in face of these arguments; <sup>4</sup> New Zealand was satisfied, though conscious that the

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<sup>1</sup> Strength in March 1939 was 9512; in September, 17,523;



and in March 1940, 15,926.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, I. p. 171

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43

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situation might change, and determined, as in the First World War, that no troops should move without adequate naval escort. She was assured that this condition would be met, and that there were solid reasons why the general interest would be promoted if New Zealanders should again serve abroad. In particular, their presence would give both to the British and the French the most convincing demonstration that they were not alone in the fight against **Hitler**.<sup>1</sup> In these circumstances, no New Zealand government could have hesitated. The problem became, therefore, the mechanical one of deciding place, time and circumstances.

Place was easily decided, on expert advice: New Zealanders should finish their training in Egypt, and be available for service where required. Time was mainly a problem of transport and protection, an administrative matter to be arranged, not without difficulty, with the Admiralty. In 1939, as in the First World War, New Zealand rejected the Admiralty's estimate of adequate escort, and there was some brisk discussion, finally resolved in personal talk in **London** between Winston Churchill and Peter Fraser. It was the first meeting of the two men, whose association was a factor of major importance in New Zealand's war effort. Maybe the soundness of their relationship owed something to the firmness with which, on this occasion, Fraser stated his country's case.<sup>2</sup>

Naval matters, however, were on the whole straightforward: as arranged, New Zealand's own ships passed under Admiralty control on

the outbreak of war. It was a different story on the military side, where a new and delicate relationship had to be worked out. Though the awkward experiences of the First World War were only hazily remembered, it was realised by thoughtful men that the smooth working of the British Commonwealth at war was an objective to be worked for, not a benefit to be taken for granted.

So far as New Zealand was concerned, the foundation for an honourable, co-operative independence was solidly laid by decisions reached at the end of 1939. When Peter Fraser was in **London** in November 1939, one of his urgent tasks was to interview **Major-General Bernard Freyberg**, who on the outbreak of war offered his services to the **New Zealand Government**, and wrote that he would be glad to serve with his compatriots again.<sup>3</sup> He was a New Zealander who had won legendary fame in the First World War, and had gone on to a distinguished career in the British Army. This gave training and experience to fit him for a high command, and intimate personal contacts with senior men in the British Army;

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. statement by Chatfield to ministerial conference, **London**, on 2 Nov 1939; and Hore-Belisha on 6 Nov 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, I, pp. 52, 56, 60. The battleship *Ramillies* was included in the escort, thereby setting a precedent which had its awkwardness later on.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23 ff.

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but it had not obliterated the early influences which made him a New Zealander still. He was willing to give up a career in the British Army to lead his countrymen into battle. Moreover, he was willing to face, from the first, the difficult responsibility of commanding the army of a small power attached to a very great one; and his personality and judgment were as tough and sound as his military valour. Something of



this was learnt by Fraser in a long personal interview, though as in duty bound he collected and forwarded to **Wellington** the favourable judgments of distinguished Englishmen on **Freyberg's** capacities. By mid-November the decision was made. **Freyberg** was offered and accepted command of New Zealand's second Expeditionary Force. The New Zealand Government had chosen better than it knew. The personal links forged at this time between Peter Fraser and both Churchill and **Freyberg** were of untold importance to wartime New Zealand.

On his appointment, wrote **Freyberg** later, he had very definite notions on the control of the new Expeditionary Force, on the powers that should be vested in its commander, and in particular on the rights which should be retained by the **New Zealand Government** when its troops went overseas. And he was firmly of the opinion that such matters should be thought out from the first, and clear understandings reached. He made some rough notes of his ideas and handed them to Fraser. He called at the War Office, where 'I found every help I could desire'. The Director of Military Operations took the attitude 'that the wishes of the **New Zealand Government** were law'. He visited **France**, and returned somewhat disturbed by the state of preparations there, by the optimism of Allied commanders, and by the way in which the British Expeditionary Force had apparently been handed over unconditionally to French command. Then he flew to New Zealand. On the plane he worked diligently on documents which he proposed to discuss with the New Zealand cabinet. They were typed and retyped; and in **Melbourne** he consulted with senior military officers who were dealing with parallel problems. Finally, he reached **Wellington** on Christmas Day, with a great deal of his thinking done, and his conclusions on paper. The documents thus prepared, it seems, were closely discussed with the Minister of Defence and with cabinet, and were, with little change, embodied in agreements between the British and New Zealand governments and between the **New Zealand Government** and its commander in the field.

Most of the material discussed between cabinet and **General Freyberg** about Christmas and the New Year concerned military matters and the

welfare of the men. **Freyberg** had insisted from the beginning that the commanding officer should be a man who understood New Zealanders and was capable of welding 'the Division into one large happy family'; and he was anxious to be sure that his powers were adequate. In addition, however, there were important political issues involved. There was a real danger that New Zealand soldiers would, in practice, be absorbed into the British armed forces; as indeed happened with the men fed into the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. With the Expeditionary Force, however, the numbers were much larger. They formed a substantial part of the manhood of the country. The disappearance of these men into the general mass of British troops would be an offence to New Zealand's sense of nationhood; and in the view of many, it would blunt the edge of fine soldierly material, and would make impossible the maintenance of the high standards of welfare on which New Zealand opinion insisted.

The essence of the problem was to hold together the New Zealand Expeditionary Force as a single well-recognised entity, with its own organisation and services; to ensure that it would be used in accordance with New Zealand wishes, formed in consultation with **Britain**, but not in automatic acceptance of British orders; and yet to ensure that, when policy decisions had once been made, the force would co-operate smoothly with Allied units to which it was attached. Its commander necessarily had a dual responsibility, which so far as possible should be defined. As a Divisional Commander within an army, he was an officer obeying orders. Yet, in another capacity, he was the 'servant of the government of New Zealand', responsible to that government, with right of direct access to it, and in practice often called upon to report to his political masters on the policy of his military superiors. The Division he commanded, **Freyberg** wrote afterwards, <sup>1</sup> 'is the Expeditionary Force of a Sovereign State, a partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations.... We are in the position of an ally, a very close one it is true, but we are not part of the British Army.... All major decisions, such as the employment of the force, are made by the New Zealand War Cabinet, and the force only comes under the command of an Allied Commander in

Chief for operational purposes.’

Relationships of this kind can be to some extent defined in documents, such as **General Freyberg's** ‘Charter’, formally signed by the Prime Minister on 5 January 1940, or in the agreement between the British and Australian governments in March.<sup>2</sup> Agreement could be reached in discussion between **Freyberg** and his friends in the British War Office, and between co-operative prime ministers. Yet the situation was irretrievably complex and even illogical, and it remained to be seen what would happen in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Army Quarterly*, October 1944, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 31; Hasluck, *Government and People, 1939–1941*, p. 217.

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heat of battle among men steeped in military tradition. It was a problem which had to be worked out in terms of human personalities, as well as of political principles, wherever the armies of independent peoples were linked together, but not fused. In later years, Eisenhower had to deal with just this situation when preparing the final blows in **Europe**, and he claimed that ‘near perfection’ was reached in the voluntary co-operation of ‘strong men representing strong and proud peoples’, and in maintaining authority in the field without sacrificing ‘the fundamental interests of each participating nation’. Basically, wrote Eisenhower, efficient voluntary co-operation must rest on a ‘highly developed sense of mutual confidence’ among the men concerned.<sup>1</sup> Something else, however, was needed too: the courage and obstinacy as well as the tact of leaders willing to hold out for principles.

The integrity of the New Zealand Division was due in no small measure to the robustness with which **Freyberg**, backed by the **New Zealand Government**, fought for the principles which, he claims, he had enunciated to the War Office and to the New Zealand cabinet in November and December 1939. His achievement was notable, not only

as a soldier, but also in the field of policy-making, when in the first two and a half years of the war his status as a Dominion Commander at times brought him into embarrassing personal conflict with military colleagues and superiors of the British Army. He was truly typical of his country in his determination to combine independence with loyalty; and his moral courage in evil times laid the foundation for teamwork in later years which was as sound and healthy in military as in political affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, pp. 6, 33–4. Cf. Collins, *Lord Wavell*, p. 217.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 9 – WHITHER?

## CHAPTER 9

### *Whither?*

BY January 1940 New Zealand had grasped the nettle of the Expeditionary Force. She had committed herself not only to despatch such a force, but to maintain it as a national army basically under New Zealand control: a symbol of the continuation in war of that national independence which a peacetime Labour government had so expressly claimed. This attitude was made plain not only by written agreements, but by the personality and attitude of the commander who had been chosen, and by the personal relationships established between Fraser, **Freyberg**, and Churchill. The decisions had then been made, the men had volunteered and the machinery set in motion. The next phase was one of administration and fulfilment: for the time being unspectacular matters. The very success with which the ranks had been filled paradoxically contributed to a period of mental slackness. There was little need to conduct recruiting campaigns or to build up morale in a community already virtually unanimous. Nor did a distant war with so little immediate impact even on the country's economic life present challenges which could be taken up with enthusiasm.

The period of comparative calm made possible, and indeed necessary, some serious discussion on war aims. Apart from a relatively few pacifists, there was no debate on the basic policy of destroying Hitlerism by force of arms. At first even the Communist party spoke with the majority, and followed the same broad lines as before the Russo-German pact of August. <sup>1</sup> 'The central question' was seen as the defeat of Hitlerism, and for a month those within the party who argued that the 'struggle against the reactionary forces in **Britain** and New Zealand is the first indispensable condition for the defeat of **Hitler**' were suppressed with some vigour. The party's policy was to participate in the war as a means towards influencing its course, and in particular to guard against a development which was more or less consciously feared by many whose thinking inclined towards the 'left' but who were by no means communists, namely, the possibility that the Western powers and

<sup>1</sup> *People's Voice*, especially 8, 22, and 29 Sep 1939.

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**conflict in a mutual hostility to [Russia](#). This suspicion was one of the factors pressing towards a definition of war aims. New Zealanders could agree that the battle was for freedom and justice, for 'human brotherhood, fair dealing and international righteousness' against dictatorship and aggression. It was a crusade in which, it was widely believed, the enemy was a savage and faithless clique, not the German people itself. New Zealand's basic war aims were the application to international affairs of that generosity and reasonableness, that inherited morality, faith in human nature, and somewhat superficial optimism which were close to the heart of the community's life.**

**Yet in this period of grace, before [Hitler](#) struck in the west, national agreement on broad objectives did not adequately define for New Zealanders the object and character of the war, or even the means by which it was to be carried on. The period therefore became one of some uncertainty and debate, which by no means qualified the country's wholehearted willingness to fight, but which probed causes and aims, and defined attitudes. At the national level, moreover, New Zealand took during this period an individual attitude in this matter. Her government from the first shared the uneasiness which prompted many in Great Britain to press Mr Chamberlain for a statement of precise aims which could be announced both to friendly Germans and to the men and women in allied countries who were being asked for unlimited efforts. This line of thought was being pressed by influential Englishmen in mid-September, <sup>1</sup> and after the defeat of [Poland](#) and the Russo-German settlement of 29 September 1939 the problem recurred more insistently. [Hitler](#), now echoed by the Russians, urged that continuance of the war was purposeless, for the extinction of [Poland](#) was a fact which the Western powers could not reverse. His virtual offer of a negotiated peace along these lines was not attractive to governments who had recently**



experienced his faithlessness. Yet during these months a war of stalemate seemed so likely that it was natural for people to lose the sense of immediate peril. When even governments did not realise their danger, it was difficult for citizens to keep vividly in mind that they were fighting a war of survival which needed for its justification no assurance that after victory the state of **Europe** would be better, or even no worse, than it was in September 1939.

The issue had, of course, seldom been stated so modestly. Naturally and—from the point of view of getting the maximum public support—wisely, the Allied leaders had from the beginning laid great emphasis on the universal and moral aspects of their

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<sup>1</sup> *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 29 Sep 1939.

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cause. But if it was necessary to represent the war as something more than a struggle for survival, further difficulties presented themselves. In view of the disillusionments of the previous two decades there was reason to fear that enthusiasm for the defence of democracy, freedom, decency and the principle that men should fulfil their covenants made, could not be sustained unless concrete illustrations were offered of what these generalities would mean. Men will not fight for a negation, it was remarked in the House of Commons, <sup>1</sup> and behind the closed doors Peter Fraser for New Zealand told the assembled statesmen of the Commonwealth that ‘the time was not far distant when the people would no longer be satisfied with broad generalities, no matter how eloquent, but would ask for a definite statement of the Allies’ objectives.’

These last words were spoken on 1 November 1939 at the Ministerial Conference in **London**, when representatives of commonwealth countries studied the tasks they had jointly undertaken. By this time the difficulties of being definite were clear, as well as the need. All agreed on the necessity to march in step with **France**, and French opinion insisted that a final solution must be found and **Europe** freed for ever from the

menace of German aggression. Material guarantees must be sought, and though the character of such solid guarantees was not well thought out, hints were not lacking that for many Frenchmen the best guarantee would be the dismemberment of **Germany** into its component parts. Any suggestion that **Britain** was considering a 'generous' peace would, it was made clear, take the heart out of the French will to fight. On the other hand, the idea of a 'hard' peace was repugnant to a great deal of British opinion, partly because the hint of it must unite **Germany** behind **Hitler**, and partly because history showed vindictive peace settlements to be followed by resurgent nationalism and wars of revenge. Faced with these facts the British Government urged caution. It kept to broad generalities which offended no one, even if they did not inspire; and it dropped over **Germany** propaganda leaflets of a character which, according to some British critics, demonstrated the current lack of constructive leadership.

New Zealand's opinion on these problems was shown in a significant exchange of views within the Commonwealth in October and November 1939. The British reply to **Hitler** was given in a statement by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on 12 October. When consulted as to its terms, New Zealand added to the inevitable approval of the general British line a cautious protest against intransigence. She felt 'it essential that, without in the slightest degree weakening our determination to put an end to

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<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 5th Series, Vol. 351, col. 1921.

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aggression once and for all, no door should even at the present juncture be closed that might lead to a peaceful solution whether by international conference or any other feasible means.'

A fortnight later a new round of discussion was started by the French. They were bearing once more the main military burden and physical risk. Their government had been told a few months before that British military help would be of token character only—too small to

justify staff conversations. <sup>1</sup> Frenchmen were asking themselves whether **Britain** now was willing to make the efforts necessary to secure permanent peace or whether she still looked for a compromise, and for an understanding with good neighbourly non-Hitlerite Germans in whose effective existence few Frenchmen believed. The only way to allay such doubts was to frame a statement of war aims pledging the British to do something much more drastic and presumably more permanent than merely to eject the present German government in favour of one more acceptable to the Allies. The British countries were thus asked to go a good deal beyond the destruction of Hitlerism, which had been the essence of the generalities thus far used.

On this problem the two **Pacific** dominions were in close agreement. In the phrase of the Australian Prime Minister victory should be followed 'by a great gesture of generosity and of justice. **Germany** would be expected to play her part as a great nation on a footing free and equal. Those who advocate not mere defeat but the destruction of **Germany** pay far too little attention to the problems which are and will be presented by **Russia, Italy** and **Japan**.' New Zealand told the Australians that 'your sentiments in favour of a generous peace are shared equally by us', and sent to Peter Fraser, then attending the Commonwealth Conference in **London**, significantly detailed instructions. These were a serious attempt to apply her well established general attitudes to the current crisis.

It was common sense, thought the New Zealand cabinet, that **Britain** and **France**, having rejected **Hitler's** terms, should state their own. Since experience showed the disastrous consequences of a dictated peace, the earliest possible moment should be seized for 'sincere and constructive peace discussions' before bitterness and exhaustion had destroyed all chance of a rational peace. The French should therefore be told that we would not be parties to an ungenerous peace, while neutral states, especially **Russia** and the **United States**, should be enlisted to persuade **Germany** to discuss the terms of just peace. Possible peace terms were then sketched in terms which, though broad, were an advance on published

generalities. The rule of law should be re-established, with the sanction behind it implied in a revived and fortified **League of Nations**. It was argued, however, that the enforcement of the law demanded not merely the punishment of wrongdoers but the establishment of conditions worth defending. The law must therefore be just and capable of peaceful amendment. The economic basis must be sound, with solution in sight of such problems as access to raw materials. And the welfare of the masses must be increased, for 'no peace is worthwhile which does not result in raising the living standards of the people.' Along such lines, wrote the New Zealand cabinet, it should be possible to pass from aims largely negative (to stop aggression, or merely to survive) to something more positive. Some progress in this sense was essential for a threefold purpose: to convince our own people that the war was worth winning, at whatever sacrifice; to convince the Germans that we had an acceptable and indeed an improved alternative to their present principles; and to convince 'neutral opinion that our cause is both just and essential to their own security and welfare <sup>1</sup>.'

The memorandum thus summarised was duly circulated to fellow delegates before the conference decided how to answer the French. Meantime, however, broad questions of policy had been discussed at the first joint meeting on 1 November. Peter Fraser for New Zealand, who was quick to respond to British suggestions for the use of our forces, was critical on political issues. He was not satisfied with Lord Halifax's opening analysis of the position. In particular, he thought that an agreement with **Russia** should have been reached some time ago, and he said bluntly that warlike enthusiasm might well vanish unless fed with more concrete fare than praise of democracy and criticism of rival political, economic and social systems. The time was certainly not ripe for drawing frontiers but the people must be told clearly the purpose for which they were fighting. A fortnight later, with the instruction of 5 November 1939 before the conference, he initiated another discussion

on war aims, adding the suggestion (which had been made before the outbreak of war by Savage) for a general conference. 'It was obvious,' he said, 'that sooner or later a conference must be held, and it would certainly be better held before both sides had suffered enormous casualties.' Such a conference would have to include neutrals as well as belligerents. At the present moment, he added, there was a pause in the fighting and a period of apparent hesitation in **Germany**: 'was not the present, therefore, an opportune moment for a general conference?'

This last suggestion was formidably criticised and Fraser admitted its difficulties, particularly those connected with reconsti-

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<sup>1</sup> Savage to Fraser, 5 Nov 1939.

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**Poland**. He was acting under explicit instructions, which were later described by a cabinet minister <sup>1</sup> as including pressure for 'an armistice and a conference'; and his defence of the basic demand for defined war aims was more effective. Even so the conference was against him. Neville Chamberlain for **Britain** had already pointed out the danger of being too definite: for example, precipitancy two months earlier might easily have replaced the present general promise to the Poles by a definite obligation to restore pre-war **Poland** intact, involving a war with **Russia** as well as with **Germany**. **Halifax** insisted, too, that precision must be avoided to avert a plain breach with French opinion. This general view prevailed and was embodied in the British Commonwealth's comments on war aims, as drafted for the French government. **Britain** accepted the French view that the mere removal of **Hitler** would not by itself guarantee the future, but urged that no suggestion of dismembering **Germany** should be made and no detailed promises given to the Poles or the Czechs. Some permanent machinery to prevent a resurgence of German power would be essential, but details could not yet be decided, and 'it would seem premature to make any public statement

of war aims in precise terms.’

The effort to obtain a definite and convincing statement of war aims had, then, failed; and as Fraser had predicted, the failure had its effect in local politics.

By the time he returned to **Wellington** there was already some insistent and intransigent opposition to New Zealand's participation in the war, that of the small Communist party. As recently as 18 August 1939 the editor of the *People's Voice* had written that ‘we in New Zealand are just as concerned in the fate of Danzig as the people of **Poland**. **Hitler** must be stopped and Danzig is the place where it must be done. **Britain** has entered into definite obligations towards **Poland**. These obligations must be honoured.’ This general attitude was abandoned on the signing of the Russo-German pact, but partially resumed in September, during which month the party supported the war against **Hitler**. By October, however, the *People's Voice* was printing material from **Russia** and from communist sources in other overseas countries which was quite incompatible with support of the war. In December a meeting of the party's national committee formally resolved ‘that the present war is an imperialist war waged by the capitalist classes of **Germany**, **Britain**, and **France** for trade, markets and colonies’, and it called on the working class of New Zealand ‘in unity with the workers of all

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<sup>1</sup> R. Semple, in *Standard*, 14 Mar 1940.

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other belligerent countries’ to end it ‘in the interests of the peoples’.

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This line led to a forthright attack on the Labour Government of New Zealand, which ‘instead of leading the New Zealand people on the road to socialism, peace and democracy,... have led it into the jaws of a new imperialist war <sup>2</sup>.’ Now that war had come, however, the party could give little practical advice on how to end it, beyond the demand that an

agreement should be reached with **Russia**; and it may be doubted whether the communist line, with its apparent subservience to Russian leadership and lack of practicable policy for those who distrusted Chamberlain but believed that **Hitler** was the most serious immediate danger, ever won much support in New Zealand. In May 1940 one of the party's ablest spokesmen, Gordon Watson, later to be killed in action in **Italy**, won at a by-election a vote claimed to be higher than had ever been cast for a communist candidate in New Zealand, but it was only 375 against the winning candidate's 5935. <sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, communist action had some significance in New Zealand politics. In the face of the country's substantial homogeneity it expressed persistent opposition. Later the party went underground and endured the mild forms of persecution possible in this country; its small, irksome, sometimes contradictory and not very respected voice kept reminding Labour men of old-fashioned objectives and of the uncomfortable fact that the defeat of **Hitler** would not of itself solve the problems of mankind. In the meantime the Communist party's sharp change of policy and at times irresponsible criticism had unfortunate effects. It alienated moderate opinion and invited repression, stinging a not illiberal government into actions which were sometimes ill-considered. The manner of its complaints made the sensible discussion of problems increasingly difficult, and so far as domestic policy was concerned, intensified the very evils against which the party was ostensibly fighting. In particular, the tactics adopted by the party made the suppression of its journal almost certain when the fall of **France** brought a real sense of tension.

It is doubtful whether any declaration of war aims could have deflected the communist attack, or even reduced its venom. Yet uneasiness at the situation was felt by more orthodox and more influential citizens of both main political parties. In particular, uneasiness developed within the Labour Party. Public policy was the concern not only of the parliamentary party, but of a complex structure of supporting organisations: local branches and trades



<sup>1</sup> *People's Voice*, 8 Dec 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Nov 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 May 1940.

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unions, Labour Representation Committees in important areas and Trades and Labour Councils. Though the Government firmly claimed the right and duty of leadership, it was naturally sensitive to the views of its organised supporters, especially when expressed in such influential gatherings as the annual conferences of the Labour Party and the Federation of Labour. In a party so numerous and embracing so much political experience, it was inevitable that a wide range of opinion should be expressed.

Almost from the first there were complaints that 'the British government consistently refuses to state its war aims <sup>1</sup>.' There were evidently many Labour supporters who fought shy of communism but felt uneasy lest this was, or should become, a war of the old imperialist type, 'a struggle for markets and raw material between capitalist **Britain** and **France** on the one side and capitalist **Germany** on the other <sup>2</sup>.' The demand was accordingly pressed that the Government should 'make public the reasons for which New Zealanders were expected to fight'; <sup>3</sup> and as months passed without clear statement of war aims and without spectacular military achievements or dangers, those elements in the country which had fought 'appeasement' became increasingly uneasy about the undefined mandate claimed by their old enemy, Neville Chamberlain. Was he even prepared to switch the war from **Germany** to **Russia**? On the testimony of W. E. Barnard, whose personal conviction on the need to fight **Hitler** was very clear, there were 'many thousands of New Zealanders of unimpeachable loyalty who are ... not satisfied with the oft repeated declarations about liberty and freedom and democracy (equality is not mentioned) which are offered as sufficient reasons for



the present sacrifice'.<sup>4</sup>

Men wanted to know not only why they were now called on to fight, but what kind of a world their efforts would help to create. 'It is fairly obvious,' wrote James O'Brien, MP, 'that until we have something definite to go on, opposition to war in all its forms will grow'.<sup>5</sup> This uneasiness was shared in high quarters. The Prime Minister himself, for all his moving public statements, apparently felt doubts: he wanted more clarity as to objectives and assurance that it would be 'a very different peace this time'. His deputy and successor, Fraser, did his best to extract definition from **London**, and correctly foretold what would happen if it were not forthcoming.

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<sup>1</sup> **Canterbury Branch**, Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, quoted in *People's Voice*, 27 Oct 1939.

<sup>2</sup> West Coast Trades and Labour Council, *Press*, 6 Dec 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Tomorrow*, 7 Feb 1940.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 Feb 1940.

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These uneasinesses must be set in their right perspective. So far as the war effort was concerned, they were variants within an accepted master pattern which was never disturbed. When the test came, New Zealand's war potential was at **Britain's** command, subject to the right of friendly though independent scrutiny of individual suggestions. Nevertheless, the military pause gave an opportunity, even a challenge, to thought. The lack of definition in war aims left the field open, and this situation led to important developments in internal politics. Not only did it make possible, and indeed stimulate, changes in both political parties; it led to a new ordering of the relations between them.

**The pattern of New Zealand's political behaviour and the tone of her wartime administration were set between September 1939 and April 1940.**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 10 – SETTLING DOWN

## CHAPTER 10

### *Settling Down*

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**THE insoluble problem of war aims accentuated a cleavage already developing within the government party. Those who asked the most awkward questions in this field were, for the most part, men within the Labour fold who were already somewhat critical of the party's leadership; critical of alleged tendencies to compromise with capitalists, to slacken the drive towards socialism, and to keep party direction in the hands of the 'Old Guard'. Such men were for the most part younger politicians, leaders of militant trades unions, and independent sympathisers of radical tendency. They carried into a government party something of the language—and the impatience—which had marked their present leaders twenty and thirty years before, and their implicit claim was to represent the true spirit of the Labour Party still unsuffused by the conservatism of age and the temptations towards compromise of high office. The most vocal of the malcontents was **J. A. Lee**, between whom and the Prime Minister a strong personal antagonism had developed. Lee was an able man who had not reached cabinet rank, and a powerful propagandist of striking personality. He spoke with added authority in wartime as one of the party members most experienced and most interested in modern war. Without touching on communism he claimed to represent the left wing of the party's economic thinking. His ability and ambition and broad, undefined radicalism had long marked him out as a natural spokesman for any serious challenge to Labour's established leadership; and the economic situation in 1939 provided clear-cut issues on which to stand.**

**The years 1938 and 1939 were marked by a prolonged financial crisis, which **Hitler's** war masked but intensified rather than resolved. After three years of general prosperity the Government was still spending over £6,000,000 yearly in promoting employment. The State's debt to the Reserve Bank leapt up during 1939, and a big increase in imports**

nearly extinguished that surplus in her external trade out of which New Zealand paid her way abroad. Moreover, spectacular events had underlined the seriousness of the situation. In 1938 the sterling balance fell suddenly and in December exchange control was hurriedly imposed to keep New Zealand solvent. A few months afterwards Walter Nash travelled to **London** to deal with the problem of converting a group of large overseas loans which fell due early in 1940. He could not arrange normal terms and had to promise repayment over a period of five years, a proceeding which would in normal times have been a very severe burden on the national economy. This virtual demand for quick repayment was an entirely new experience in New Zealand's history, for her development had been financed by long-term loans, which neither lender nor borrower expected would be repaid. It showed the power still held by a lender over a community whose credit had been shaken, and underlined a dependence which the development of dominion status—of virtual sovereignty in international affairs—had done little to weaken.

This was the problem that crystallised a sharp difference of opinion within the Labour Party. Cabinet evidently judged that the time had come, if not for credit restriction, at least for a slowing down of the expansionist policy followed since 1935. The 1939 Budget forecast measures to deal with inflation, and was close enough to orthodoxy to give considerable gratification to the Opposition and to infuriate a powerful element in the Labour Party. Belief in the supreme importance of control over credit and currency had become strong and widespread in New Zealand during the depression, and with it the feeling that powers so vital should be in the last resort under public and not private control. Advocacy of something vaguely called 'social credit' had played an important part in Labour's victory of 1935, and this line of thinking was strongly represented in the new government. One of its first and most important actions was to take full state control over the new Reserve Bank. By the Act of 1936 the bank operated its extensive powers under the direction of the Minister of Finance, and it was used directly to finance such major schemes as state housing and guaranteed prices for dairy produce. For the orthodox these proceedings were noxious both in

**principle and in detail; but advocates of 'social credit' were still unappeased. In the last months of peace they accused the party leadership and especially the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash, of undue caution and conservatism in the use of his powers, and demanded in effect that social welfare should continue to be vigorously promoted by the use of debt-free credit from the Reserve Bank.**

**The conversion operations imposed on Nash in 1939 were to Lee an example of the unscrupulous exercise of brutal and impersonal financial power which it was precisely the duty of a socialist government to combat. The correct policy, therefore, was to answer by continual credit expansion in defiance of the London money market. To the apprehension of his leaders that such expansion would lead to inflation Lee made no answer that has been recorded, but to their acute embarrassment he did not fear to use the dread word 'repudiation' in relation to overseas debt. If the screw were turned hard enough to force the issue, New Zealand, he said, should refuse to meet her overseas debts rather than sacrifice the well-being of her own people.**

**This conflict of opinion within the government party was unresolved in September 1939, and was inevitably accentuated from the outbreak of war. The flow of consumers' goods was further slowed down, and at the same time defence expenditure built up purchasing power. Moreover, long established Labour Party attitudes were very relevant and very embarrassing to the Government's more orthodox advisers. In particular, there was a long-standing promise that conscription of wealth must precede—or at least accompany—conscription of manpower. The origin and general intention of this promise was clear enough, however unprecise its meaning when examined by economists and administrators. Since the first introduction of compulsory training, and particularly during the First World War, the Labour Party had vehemently opposed conscription. It had strongly contrasted the sacrifice of life and limb made by the conscript with the prospering of 'profiteers' behind the lines. It had complained that soldiers came home to find that the cost of living had soared—for other men's benefit—and**

that the war had been financed by loans which they must help to repay; and it suggested that these evils should be avoided by imposing as rigorous a compulsion in economic as in military matters. If wealth could be conscripted it would appear that civilians could be given precisely the same pay and conditions as soldiers, and capital, instead of commanding the high interest rates of the previous generation, could be levied free of interest to the extent necessary for the public good.

This line of thought naturally had a wide appeal within the Labour Party, and more particularly in its industrial wing, but with the outbreak of war there was an obvious conflict between the desire to avoid profiteering and organise equality of sacrifice in a national crisis and the need to get things done quickly and on a large scale. In an informative debate on 20 September <sup>1</sup> the Government's position was made clear. There should be no profiteering or exploitation, either within the Dominion or in bargains struck between the Dominion and the **United Kingdom**. In the phrase of Walter Nash, as Minister of Finance, 'The policy of the Govern-

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 256.

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and of the country must be no profiteering—not “no undue” profiteering, but no profiteering of any kind whatever.... It is that little “undue” that will lead us to all the difficulties we faced in 1914–18’. <sup>1</sup> On the broader issue Fraser, as acting Prime Minister, said that his Government was ‘prepared to carry on, if it could be done, at the same rate for everyone as for the soldiers; that that should be a common footing for us all’. It was as yet impossible, he said, to adjust everyone to that basis; but it might come about that sacrifice would have to be equalised. ‘The time may come, if this war goes on, when we will have to do actually what today we all subscribe to in theory and in heart’. <sup>2</sup>



**The Government, in short, was compromising, as governments must. It would have been administratively as well as politically impossible to have carried out a wholesale, state-directed mobilisation of men and industry in the public interest and in defiance of private wishes. Even a reforming government must use the methods and institutions and men available; wartime haste breeds conservatism rather than radical experiment. That at least was the judgment of those elements in the Labour Party who were already accusing cabinet of far too great a readiness to use instead of to destroy the machinery of a previous era. The war situation thus aggravated an existing struggle for leadership of the powerful Labour Party machine—a struggle which could no longer be postponed, if only because the Prime Minister was mortally ill, and there was no individual whose prestige in party and country stood so high that he could claim unquestioned right to the succession.**

**In the first phase of the war, the public was soothed by news of Savage's improved health—and indeed he continued to give effective broadcasts—while an obscure duel was fought between his old associates and his new critics. Ostensibly these last had powerful weapons in hand: disappointment among the rank and file in the slackened progress of 1938 and 1939, and in the disappearance of ultimate socialism beyond the horizon of practical politics, while the emotive formula 'conscription of wealth' gave the force of established tradition to the demand for radical measures in organising war. In practice, however, Lee and his followers commanded neither sufficient weight in personality nor a sufficiently practicable programme. Their chief antagonist, Peter Fraser, who was to display high qualities of statesmanship when released from local pressure groups, had all the craft of a successful party manager; and he secured within the industrial wing supporters of ability, tenacity and wide political experience, of whom **F. P. Walsh** was perhaps the best known. Such a combination was powerful, especially when**

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 249.

**operating within a large and normally well disciplined organisation. The struggle came to its end on 25 March 1940, when Lee was expelled from the Labour Party by 546 votes to 344 at the annual Labour Party conference. His conduct towards Savage was the main count in the indictment against him and a report from the Prime Minister denouncing him was read to the conference. When Savage died, two days later, he was quickly succeeded by Fraser as leader of the parliamentary Labour Party and as Prime Minister. The rebellion was defeated, and the change of Prime Ministers marked no change in policy. The cabinet which took office at the end of 1935 remained basically unchanged until its defeat in 1949. Personal and party loyalties held firm, and as older men occasionally dropped out the younger were admitted without deflection of policy.**

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**The expulsion of Lee from the party and the appointment of Fraser as Prime Minister had implications of first-class importance in the functioning of the Labour Party and in the relations between Government and Opposition during the critical months that followed.**

**Within the Labour Party, the defeat of the rebellion strengthened a trend towards authoritarianism. The leadership had already shown great sensitivity to the persistent and virulent abuse by the Communist party, and had reacted by forms of censorship which became increasingly stringent. The party's national executive had, moreover, in the early days of the war declared for the expulsion of any member who supported any communist agency; and its disciplinary action extended to any person or group that departed from the party's accepted platform, or publicly attacked the Labour government. There was, in fact, a tightening of discipline to preserve the 'elementary and vital principle of party unity', and in the so-called 'black circular' of 20 October 1939 the**

**national executive not only laid down rules to prevent snap resolutions being passed to criticise the Government, but recommended that for the time being no public political meetings should be held. <sup>1</sup> When in 1940 party leadership was cemented by the expulsion of a leading critic, the feeling naturally grew that criticism within the ranks was not greatly welcome and that an established and well-tryed leadership was asking to be given a free hand during the wartime emergency. It may be doubted whether this free hand was silently conceded either by the political or industrial wings of the movement. Moreover, the trend towards authoritarianism was gravely disturbing to many,**

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**<sup>1</sup> *Christchurch Press*, 20 Oct 1939; statement by Nash, *Evening Post*, 11 Nov 1939.**

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**particularly to that younger generation bred in the idealisms and disappointments of the First World War, the *League of Nations*, and the slump: young men and women who had been taught to use their minds, and who, whether within or without the Labour Party, had expected a Labour government to give a lead towards democratic behaviour in wartime as in peace.**

**The new trends, therefore, were not unchallenged. Nevertheless, the events of September 1939 to May 1940 certainly strengthened the grip over the party and therefore over national policy of the men who had guided Labour to power.**

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**If these events strengthened the Prime Minister's hand—at the cost of considerable subterranean criticism—they also gave a new aspect to the long search for a broad political unity in face of national danger. They amounted to the defeat of the Labour Party elements least trusted by the Opposition and the victory of the 'old guard', whose economic policy, though distasteful to it, was not revolutionary. With Peter Fraser in power it was clear that the war situation would not be used to push**

doctrinaire 'socialism', and that the principle of conscripting wealth would be applied in a form not unduly novel. Wartime economic policy, and the institutions through which it was administered, brought no breach with the past more drastic than that imposed on his reluctant followers by J. G. Coates during the battle against the depression. There was a basis here for subsequent agreement on the general policy of economic stabilisation. Moreover, it had long been known that Fraser himself was personally in favour of closer collaboration between the two parties.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the forces within both parties operating against a coalition government proved overwhelmingly strong. Indeed, during the first eight months of war New Zealand became more rather than less pledged to maintain the conventional party form of government.

New Zealand's declaration of war against **Germany** was made with every appearance of national and parliamentary unanimity. The necessity to fight, and indeed to concentrate every effort in a war to which no sensible man could expect a foregone conclusion, was so plain that normal preoccupations could scarcely compete for attention. The conclusion which seemed obvious to spokesmen for the Opposition was that domestic politics should in effect be shelved in a national war effort. The Leader of the Opposition, Adam Hamilton, and two former prime ministers, G. W. Forbes and J. G. Coates, were taken into the Government's

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 447, 28 Sep 1939.

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confidence on the war crisis and shown confidential despatches.<sup>1</sup> Their reaction was clear: 'Even the most determined disagreement on questions of domestic policy must now be put into the background.... Party politics must be laid aside so that our people may be united in their determination and effort<sup>2</sup>.' This attitude was clearly welcome to Peter Fraser, then acting Prime Minister. When the House of Representatives met on 5 September 1939 to confirm the declaration of war, he explained that the two parties had arranged for Parliament to

pass at once the estimates which were being considered and then adjourn for a week for the Government to review the situation and settle its whole programme. A major objective, he told the House, would be to avoid political dissension. 'We know that we speak with one voice on the overwhelmingly important question that overshadows everything else, but we want as far as possible to agree on those matters where agreement can be reached, and if it can be done, to postpone matters on which there are obvious political disagreements, also postpone matters which are not urgent <sup>3</sup>.' In response, the Opposition promised all co-operation with the Government in the discharge of its new responsibilities.

During the week's adjournment that followed, the Labour cabinet and caucus had a twofold task: first, to concoct measures for carrying on the war, a tough but relatively straightforward task based on previous plans, as modified by current British suggestions: and second, to decide what was to be done about domestic policy. The country was one year removed from a hard-fought general election, in which divergencies in viewpoint were wide in spite of the substantial identity in practical proposals. The Opposition's offer of co-operation depended on the abandonment of 'controversial legislation'; but there was a substantial section of the Labour Party which thought that the party programme, plus the 1938 victory, was an express mandate precisely to do controversial things. To the Opposition the war dictated adherence to the well-tried weapons of the past; to many Labourites it set their social and economic programme in a new light—this now became an instrument for urgent use in a crisis, instead of a mere long-term objective. Between these two viewpoints Fraser was feeling for a compromise. His eye was on the dreary prospect of international affairs as well as on the turmoil of domestic politics. His hope was evidently to find within his own party, and in the Opposition, a broad insistence on the overwhelming importance of the war effort. He hoped to widen the

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 2 and 4 Sep 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 21.

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area of agreement and to postpone, or at least soften, controversies which could not be avoided.

When Parliament reassembled on 12 September there was still an atmosphere of slightly uneasy truce. The Government was not quite ready with detailed plans, but it introduced the Emergency Regulations Bill to replace the Public Safety Conservation Act, 1932, as authority for wartime government by regulation. The new measure was drafted very widely indeed, giving cabinet virtually unlimited power to legislate; but the Opposition contented itself with pointing out dangers of abuse and the need for utmost care in administration. 'We acquiesce at this time,' said Adam Hamilton, leader of the National Party, 'or at any rate we do not intend unnecessarily to obstruct or resist'. His deputy, Coates, said bluntly that 'our only thought' must be the successful prosecution of the war, that all must help the Government to get its plans on to a sound basis, and that criticisms should be made 'not merely for the purpose of criticising but with a real desire that the best should be done in the circumstances in which we find ourselves <sup>1</sup>.'

The Opposition's attitude was that of unlimited co-operation in war measures, but with the right of responsible criticism reserved, an attitude expressly welcomed by the acting Prime Minister; and in spite of some stormy days, the same attitude was professed by both sides when Parliament adjourned three weeks later. 'We have withdrawn fierce opposition for the time being,' said Hamilton on 6 October, <sup>2</sup> 'and we have offered our genuine co-operation to the Government. That in no way prevents us from using the full force of our attack on occasions when we think the Government is in the wrong.' He referred with some pride to the debate of the previous night which showed that the Opposition had not lost its parliamentary skills and could put up a good

fight if necessary, and a few days later made it very clear ‘that the co-operation of the Opposition does not extend into the normal political field <sup>3</sup>.’ This reservation did not mean that the ‘truce’ was at an end, at least so far as the leaders were concerned. Peter Fraser said frankly that the criticisms brought by the Opposition were of the kind to be expected and even desired in a democracy. ‘The right of criticism and pointing out abuses of power is inherent in our democratic institutions,’ he said at the beginning of the session, <sup>4</sup> and at the end he remarked that it had been understood that when measures were discussed which ‘involved unavoidable and essential differences of political outlook and principles ... there was to be no curtailment

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, pp. 94, 98, 13 Sep 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 841.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 12 Oct 1939.

<sup>4</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 103.

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of expression of opinion, no sinking of principles, and no avoiding of issues. We did not expect anything of that sort and we think the attitude of the Opposition has been quite correct with regard to these matters <sup>1</sup>.’

Nevertheless, in spite of friendly valedictions, events had already taken a decisive twist by the time Parliament adjourned on 6 October. It soon became clear that in the view of Adam Hamilton, who among the Opposition leaders was one of those most likely to meet the Government halfway, Peter Fraser had had ill success with his avowed policy of so trimming his party's legislative programme that contentious issues would be postponed or reduced to a minimum. On the contrary, Hamilton pronounced the legislation of the session to have been ‘revolutionary and objectionable’ and to have been introduced



deliberately, after full consideration. In his view the Government had rejected his offer of co-operation, and was pushing its normal domestic policy under the guise of wartime emergency. <sup>2</sup> On the political side the Emergency Regulations Act, which gave the executive the right to rule by regulation, was perhaps a disagreeable necessity, but its use had to be vigilantly watched, and the Opposition fought tooth and nail against other Government measures. In particular, it took the greatest exception to the Reserve Bank Amendment Act and the Marketing Amendment Act. <sup>3</sup> The first extended the powers of the bank and required it without qualification to carry out the Government's decisions. The second gave power to buy and resell any commodities at prices to be fixed by the State. These Acts were regarded by the Opposition as major steps in the direction of autocracy and socialism.

The Government's domestic policy in general, and in particular the Reserve Bank and Marketing Acts, were bitterly attacked in Parliament, in the press, and in a political campaign through the country after Parliament adjourned. The attack was as vigorously answered and, in the phrase of a journal whose business was controversy, 'things healthily reverted to normal <sup>4</sup>.' After the parliamentary adjournment the most systematic statement of the Government's case was that put forward in a series of radio broadcasts delivered by the Prime Minister. Though the fact was not then widely known, Savage was by this time so ill, and he was so little at home in the new war situation, that his broadcasts may be read as reflecting in a more than ordinary sense the views of his advisers, and (more particularly) of his deputy and successor, Peter Fraser. The line was set in the Prime Minister's national

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 256, p. 840.

<sup>2</sup> *Hawke's Bay Daily Mail*, 14 Nov 1939.

<sup>3</sup> *Round Table*, March 1940, p. 462.



broadcast of 26 November. The suggestion had been made, he said, that a wartime government should purchase the Opposition's good will and thus establish national harmony by abandoning the domestic policy which it had been elected to carry out. If this were done, he argued, the will of a minority would prevail; and the majority would be antagonised by a move which was probably immoral and which might not even win the steady collaboration of the government's erstwhile enemies. He recognised, he said, that the waging of war to victory must be the government's paramount concern, and that if it came to the point 'every item of domestic policy must be subordinated to it'. Subject to this principle, however, a government was bound to carry out its election platform and an opposition should refrain from attacking developments that would have taken place if there had been no war. He acknowledged frankly that a government's power must expand in wartime, and that at the end of a long war it would be impossible promptly to go back to the *status quo*. Nevertheless, there was a strong moral obligation on the government not to enlarge its powers 'on the pretext that these are necessary, if in truth they are not necessary, for the successful carrying out of the war'. There was also an obligation to give up powers which had been taken to meet emergencies when those emergencies no longer existed. On this general basis, he said, 'mutual concessions, reciprocal restraints are as feasible as they are desirable' between a government and the opponents of its domestic policy. 'Let us never forget that political controversy, though a peacetime necessity, is a wartime luxury 1.'

This appeal asked much of an opposition which had already denounced leading government measures as being precisely an acceleration of party policy under guise of national necessity. It probably asked more than any virile opposition could concede while the war was still uneventful and rather remote. During the summer of 1939–40, therefore, the Opposition continued strong criticism of the

**Government's domestic policy in terms that were familiar enough in normal peacetime controversy, but which, as used by less responsible spokesmen, amounted to violent abuse. They were answered in terms equally violent. To those who said that at home 'we must fight Nash-ism as the men overseas were fighting Nazism', <sup>2</sup> it was retorted that extreme and unscrupulous criticism amounted to sedition and an obstruction of the war effort. Controversies thus phrased showed clearly enough how, in the slack months that followed the fall of **Poland**, the scale of values in political discussions became disturbed.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 27 Nov 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Standard*, 30 Nov 1939; *Opotiki News*, 20 Oct 1939.

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**In this atmosphere the two main parties naturally drifted apart, even in respect to war measures. By November, for example, the Opposition chiefs had ceased to consult the policy cables exchanged with the British Government; they could scarcely take advantage of this access to confidential documents while engaged in severe criticism of general government policy. <sup>1</sup> In the rank and file of the Opposition a more far-reaching change of tone was taking place which was, in due course, to culminate in the replacement of the existing leadership by one which might be described as more virile or more virulent according to one's political predilections. <sup>2</sup> It must remain a matter of speculation as to whether this hardening trend in domestic politics might have been arrested if the war situation had been from the first as tense as it became in May 1940. As it was, the period of relative calm promoted a swing within the Opposition towards more 'normal' party behaviour, which in turn would put increasing difficulties on those in both camps who favoured more intimate collaboration.**

**During the summer of 1939–40 the Government was, then, faced with three currents of discontent: on the left a small noisy minority accused it of betraying the interests of the working-class; on the right,**

criticism of economic policy overflowed into general denunciation; and small but embarrassingly sincere and active groups of conscientious objectors questioned the whole morality of war. A period of slackness in military operations and an inevitable sense of frustration and ineffectiveness had opened the door to criticism. This in turn made an already sensitive cabinet more sensitive still, and made it more authoritarian both in relation to its own political followers and to the community as a whole.

#### **IV**

Looking back, it may be doubted whether opposition ran deep enough to affect seriously the national unity of purpose, or the strength of the national effort. At the time, however, leaders of both parties agreed that the situation had elements of danger, and the natural result was a tightening of the Emergency Regulations <sup>3</sup> on 22 February 1940 'to put an end to the dangerous state of affairs which has been developing recently.' The amended regulations extended the law against subversion and gave the police wide powers to deal with processions or meetings likely to be injurious to public safety. The Government had from the first claimed that it would be exceedingly tolerant of all genuine criticism, while  
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<sup>1</sup> Cf. statement by Hamilton, *Hawke's Bay Daily Mail*, 14 Nov 1939.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 143 and

<sup>3</sup> Statement by Fraser, 25 Feb 1940; *Evening Post*, 26 Feb 1940.

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fastly

enforcing the law against those of any political persuasion who injured the war effort. Peter Fraser, as minister in charge, now again emphasised his desire to preserve the freedoms of the individual, but he said 'freedom to incite damage, and do injury to New Zealand and New Zealand's war effort is not freedom of speech; freedom to sabotage this country by deliberately disseminating false statements is not freedom of thought; endeavouring to prevent men enlisting is not political freedom. Placing the interests of foreign powers before those of our own country is not freedom but a gross abuse of freedom.'

The regulations of February 1940 completed the main structure of a formidable system of censorship and of control over public expression of opinion. They are a reminder, too, that this system had an object much more complex than the straightforward denial to the enemy of military information. Censorship of civilian mail was not regarded, as was censorship in the Army, as a valued means of testing opinion, but it sometimes provided useful information. <sup>1</sup> In addition, it was felt that in some circumstances too great publicity in the mere exchange of opinion might gravely impede the war effort; if confidence in the general capacity of the Government to run the war were undermined, whether locally or overseas, damage might well be done. In the early months of the war, therefore, postal censors were apt to cut from letters criticism of government policy, criticism which was mainly aimed at slackness of effort, but which censors regarded as 'exaggerated' or 'likely to mislead'. Such action was naturally resented, and policy was soon modified. Instructions from the controller of censorship in late 1939 and early 1940 did much to remove cutting which was close to the margin of being political in effect, though not in intention.

**This branch of censorship was managed within the Post and Telegraph Department, and with no observable political bias; though incidents naturally occurred and were used by a rejuvenated Opposition for political purposes. <sup>2</sup> The main criticism that censorship had a political implication was however directed at the activities of the Director of Publicity, J. T. Paul, who had been closely associated with the Labour movement for some forty years and with the press for a still longer period, and who at the outbreak of war had been placed in control of the press and the censorship of outgoing news. The policy as regards the latter, as formulated in April 1940, was drastic: 'it is proposed to suppress all outward press news which is likely to convey a prejudicial view to overseas countries concerning the National War Effort in New Zealand. This will include comment implying disunity on the part of political parties as affecting the**

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 101, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, 13 Oct 1944.

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**Government's war measures, and in addition information concerning anti-war and communist organisations <sup>1</sup>.' As regards the local press Mr Paul's position was clear too: 'the liberty of the Press and temporary liberty of any one of us cannot tip the scale against the possible perpetual slavery which would follow defeat in the war.' In other words, public policy, 'the greatest good of the greatest number', must give the answer as to whether or not any particular cable might be sent or any item of news published locally.**

**This last principle would, of course, have been accepted universally, with the vital qualification that in a democratic community men must know the facts necessary to enable them to form responsible judgment. The difficulty arose in that vast area in which the application of principle to individual cases was not axiomatic. In such cases the New Zealand system concentrated the power of interpretation in the hands of**

the Director of Publicity and his assistants. He and his political chief, the Prime Minister, came from a political party to which the press was almost unanimously opposed. For many the determination to avoid undue encroachments on the liberty of the press was strengthened by irritations of a more partisan kind, and during most of the war the Director of Publicity fought more or less friendly guerrilla warfare with the press.

His powers were in the last resort immense, for he was part of an executive machine clothed with almost unlimited authority under the Emergency Regulations. For instance, it would not have required any high degree of ingenuity to brand almost any political criticism as subversive, since subversive reports included those that were false, or likely to cause disaffection to His Majesty, or likely to disturb the morale of civilians or soldiers.<sup>2</sup> However, the Government had taken more powers than it had any intention of using, and in practice the Director of Publicity worked in three main ways: the press was forbidden to publish specified news items, or material bearing on certain subjects, without reference to him; it was invited or exhorted to adopt certain policies; and when it published material which the Director judged prejudicial to the public interest, it was reprovved, and in certain cases prosecuted. In addition, the Government held the right, which it occasionally exercised, to suppress a publication altogether. The Director's strong preference was naturally to proceed by co-operation, not compulsion or threat; his own testimony<sup>3</sup> in 1943 was that the press normally complied with requests even when there could be no threat of legal action.

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<sup>1</sup> Circular of 17 Apr 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Emergency Regulations 1939/121.

<sup>3</sup> On 30 December 1943 in statement concerning proposed action against [R. H. Billens](#).

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By April 1940 New Zealand was fighting her war in some comfort. Military action had slipped into the well-worn and emotionally satisfying channel of co-operation by expeditionary force. Military discussion amounted essentially to a hot debate on whether or not that force could—or should—be maintained by volunteers. At each extreme in this debate were those with strong prior commitments: Labourites pledged against conscription, and conservatives convinced that it was immoral as well as impracticable to rely on the patriots and allow slackers to escape. For the most part, New Zealanders were content to observe that the existing system was thus far producing the required results. As late as 6 May 1940, Peter Fraser said plainly that if New Zealand were in danger ‘then automatically every man, woman and child and every penny of wealth would be at the disposal of the state’. But he added that up to the present time ‘the voluntary system had been a great success, and the Government adhered to it’.<sup>1</sup> None but fanatics, therefore, expected any change in military policy till fighting should flare up.

Similarly, the economic system had adapted itself well enough to the muffled shock of an inactive war. New Zealand's system of economic controls—including control of imports and of overseas exchange—was already well advanced in 1939, and could be adapted with relatively little experimentation to a wartime situation. Overseas trade, the life blood of New Zealand, passed entirely under state management, and dairy produce, meat and wool were sold in bulk to the British Government at prices somewhat above those of the previous season. Income thus remained reasonably high, and though there were awkward interruptions in supply, life was much more normal than could have been expected. Experts somewhat ruefully contemplated long-term dangers. For instance, though patriotic New Zealanders were urged to produce more food, it was by no means clear that **Britain** would buy without limit; indeed in April 1940 there was a real threat that purchases would be cut down and British larders replenished from **Denmark**. Again, while New Zealand's policy was—and remained—that of selling at prices approximating to those of 1939, the prices charged for her imports greatly increased. A suggestion that if this went on the prices for New



**Zealand's exports should be increased, so that her income would remain roughly stable, was received without sympathy in [Britain](#). Further, there was a real threat that two of her staple products—butter and wool—might be displaced by substitutes. For New Zealand, therefore, the war might amount to a slow strangulation of economic life.**

**Such fears were expressed at the time, <sup>2</sup> but scarcely influenced**

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<sup>1</sup> **[Auckland Star](#), 7 May 1940.**

<sup>2</sup> ***Round Table*, June 1940, p. 721.**

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**public sentiment except perhaps as part of a general feeling of futility. When the fall of [Poland](#) was followed by long months of military inactivity, New Zealanders like others asked themselves how this war, however justly launched, could ever reach a conclusion. Leading citizens confessed frankly, if not for publication, that though faith in ultimate victory was unshaken, they could conceive no sequence of events by which it could come about. Meantime, the soldiers of the Expeditionary Force proceeded by due stages towards the scene of their future activities, farms and factories ground out their supplies, and the community followed wise injunctions towards business as usual. Debates about war aims continued. Liberal-minded watchdogs vigilantly exposed wartime threats to civil liberties. Small groups of pacifists and communists pricked the Government into spasmodic action. The benevolent cloak of censorship lulled fears and took the edges from political discussion. The armed forces progressively engulfed a generation of young men who were to show in practice that they could respond quietly to a crisis. They were preparing conclusive evidence that New Zealanders—well fed and materialistic, sheltered, remote from the dangers and tensions that afflict the vast majority of mankind, rejecting forethought and apprehension—yet can answer when the challenge comes.**



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 11 – SEARCH FOR UNITY

## CHAPTER 11

### *Search for Unity*

ON 9 April 1940 the crash of Hitler's occupation of Denmark and Norway resounded through the world. It disturbed but did not destroy the sense of unreality in a war that was fought only at sea and that spasmodically. A month later the whole weight of German attack was thrown against the Dutch and Belgians, against the French, and against Britain's tiny Expeditionary Force. In a sense, wrote a thoughtful British patriot at the time, <sup>1</sup> the shock was welcome: it blasted Britain from numbing acceptance of war without immediate challenge, in which initiative remained with the enemy, and in which Britain's own leadership could forecast no intelligible strategy of victory beyond soothing calculations of potential strength. Almost overnight the crisis became vivid, a struggle for life as well as for national values, a struggle to be entered with buoyancy and courage, and with that added fierceness that comes from calculated hope tinged with fear. It was a spiritual experience, a challenge to national revival as well as a military threat of the first magnitude.

If Britain, before May, had subsided into an unreal routine, New Zealand was 12,000 miles further removed from reality; even in May, with no closer touch with disaster than that conveyed by the smooth, comforting voice of the BBC recounting calamities, New Zealanders could only by sustained efforts of the imagination share the experiences of their kinsmen. The nature of the crisis was indeed well enough understood by the leaders of the Government. This was not only a matter of intellectual understanding, based on voluminous and very frank day-to-day information and on personal visits abroad. Peter Fraser, now Prime Minister, was a Scot, and his principal lieutenant, Walter Nash, an Englishman; both developed in a high degree that peculiar combination of Dominion-conscious independence with a sense of oneness with the 'Mother Country' which was so characteristic an element in New Zealand life. Nor did the then leaders of the Opposition, Hamilton and Coates, need any prompting in the matter. They, too, had

served in cabinets and had seen the crisis develop. Yet leaders' words, however vehement, could only bridge inadequately the difference 'between the thunderous

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, June 1940, p. 499.

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atmosphere of **Europe** and the obstinately normal course of life in the South Pacific; a faint sense of unreality persisted, only to be dissipated, and that temporarily, in the months following the disaster at **Pearl Harbour**.

The crisis of mid-1940, then, had only a temporary impact and in any case was partially muffled by distance. Its moral, however, was not obscure. The Commonwealth faced disaster, and New Zealand could not put less than her total resources into the scale. This meant total powers for the Government, and legislation in **Britain** provided the model. Though all-or almost all-could agree with such reasoning, the situation embodied a much less clear imperative to the community than in **Britain**; and the kind of action envisaged demanded sacrifices of principle from both the main parties. Was it proper to concede unlimited powers to a government which still frankly retained its party character? Was some kind of joint administration possible? The answers to these questions were sought at leisure, along lines indicated by recent internal politics.

When the storm broke in **Europe** the political situation in New Zealand was relatively calm. Those elements in the Opposition that were soon to insist on revived party warfare were still not unduly prominent, and a potential swing towards the left in the Labour Party had been sharply arrested. By May 1940 that party was indeed a distinctly more conservative body than it had been eight months earlier. In this move away from radicalism the most important incident was not a result of the war. Though **J. A. Lee** had differences with the party leadership as to how the war should be waged, both their charges against him and his against them were mainly concerned with domestic issues. In other

points, however, the purge of 'extremists' was directly due to the war. The Labour Party as it had emerged in the war of 1914-18 was to a considerable degree the party of those who, in the words which Toynbee uses to define a proletariat, were 'in the community but not of it.' This quality had of course been growing less and less pronounced both in Labour's later years of opposition and in its five years in office, during which it had realised many of the aspirations of those who had been discontented in 1935. In 1939, however, a small hard core of disaffection still remained, and the breach between this element and the majority was precipitated by the war. Here was an issue which divided the community into those who did and those who did not think that the *status quo* was sufficiently worth while for violence to be used in its defence. Just as the Government secured for its war policy the not too severely qualified support of many who found its peacetime programme too radical, so it encountered on this, as on no other issue, the opposition of the communists and of a minority of its own supporters whose thinking inclined towards Marxist or pacifist doctrine, or indeed retained the obstinate radicalism of which **H. E. Holland** had been an eloquent spokesman.

A pointer to the new situation had been given by Savage in a broadcast of 11 February 1940: 'Freedom, such as we enjoy, breeds the truest patriots,' he said, 'but its genial climate permits also the growth of cranks, and ingrates; of dreamers of fantastic dreams; of ideological oddities and ne'er-do-wells; a diversity of creatures having this at least in common, the urge to propagate error <sup>1</sup>.' Such reproaches had often been directed by the conservatively minded against Savage's followers and against Savage himself: it was eloquent of the tide that was running in the higher levels of New Zealand politics that he should now be employing them. After all, much that was fruitful, and more particularly much that was democratic, in British politics had been contributed by those castigated as cranks, dreamers of fantastic dreams, and ideological oddities. There were those at the time who felt that Labour's leadership was then being less than true to its own tradition; that in cutting free from a possible source of embarrassment it was also

isolating itself from a reserve of courage and enterprise or at least of stimulus.

Also significant was the change in the fortunes of Mr C. G. Scrimgeour. He was a legacy from the depression, during which his session from a private radio station, The Friendly Road, was a feature of New Zealand politics; and his vogue was a symptom of the continuing power of depression-time mentality, well into the years of recovery and of war. With Labour's victory in 1935 he entered the government service as Director of Commercial Broadcasting, and his session continued. For many years he addressed Sunday night radio homilies to the 'Man in the Street' in which, in terms of a highly diluted Christianity (his signature tune was 'The Stranger of Galilee'), he stressed the merits of a hardly less indefinite policy of social reform. These sessions gained a considerable audience in the New Zealand of the late 'thirties and had, in their saccharinish way, a professedly radical flavour which was more typical of Savage than of his more hard-headed lieutenants. At the end of 1939 Savage had firmly defended Scrimgeour against the indignation of the farmers whom he was alleged to have slandered. When Savage died Scrimgeour delivered a memorial broadcast in which he remarked that the greatest tribute that could be paid to Mr Savage would be not to lose John Lee also. This was not the view of Savage's successor any more than it had been of Savage himself, and on the following Sunday Scrimgeour's sessions were suspended, at the request, it was said, of Fraser. Though he was back on the air again after a week the writing was on the wall for him.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, Feb 1940.

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The changed tone was, indeed, made more noticeable by the death of Savage. There is not the slightest evidence that Fraser's ideas on social policy were any less progressive. But as the radical journal *Tomorrow* observed, 'The death of Mr Savage has deprived the Labour Party of a leader who was popular not only with supporters of the party but with all

those people who feel vaguely that some change in society is necessary. Mr Savage had the ability to inspire people with his confidence that the Labour Party could banish the evils of capitalism by social reform <sup>1</sup>.' On the other hand, Peter Fraser might be expected to command more general confidence as wartime prime minister, and the reactions in the New Zealand press to his assumption of office were significantly cordial.

By the beginning of May the turbulence that accompanied these adjustments in the Labour movement was over, and it once more presented the appearance of unity. It was led by an able realist, whose wish for all-party co-operation in war-making was well known, and its relations with the National Party seemed better than at any time since the short-lived political truce after the outbreak of war. Although Hamilton had expressed uneasiness at the Government's delay in calling Parliament together, the other questions that were shortly to become so acute were for the time being below the horizon. The Nationalists were not pressing the conscription issue, and showed no desire for a coalition. Their decision not to contest the Auckland West seat left vacant by the death of Mr Savage was typical of improved relations. Indeed, there were some who felt the National Party was unduly supine. Mr **E. R. Toop**, president of the right-wing People's Movement founded in November 1939, complained that 'The National Party is at present inarticulate as a Parliamentary Opposition <sup>2</sup>.' It was, therefore, upon a tranquil political scene in New Zealand that the news of the German offensive in the west arrived on the evening of Friday, 10 May 1940.

The Allied reverses in the Norwegian campaign, which in England led to the fall of Neville Chamberlain, did not cause any manifestation of public uneasiness in this country, and indeed the first week of the German offensive in May seems to have been accompanied by only minor public reactions in New Zealand. Representatives of the Farmers' Union and of the Chambers of Commerce urged an increase in the working week; reports of 'fifth column' activities in **Norway** and the Low Countries led to some demand for the internment of enemy aliens; and there were complaints of the lack of inspiring leadership. Further, the

formation of Winston Churchill's coalition government-a few hours after the main attack began-naturally led to suggestions from the press, from

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<sup>1</sup> *Tomorrow*, 3 Apr 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 4 May 1940.

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the People's Movement and from the conservative Freedom Association that New Zealand should follow suit. The National Party itself made no move at this stage, however, and both Fraser and Nash hastened to indicate that they considered a coalition in New Zealand to be unnecessary. The country was in fact preoccupied with the news from **Europe** rather than with the action that such disasters might require from New Zealand politicians; and that news was sufficiently alarming. On 14 May the Dutch army ceased resistance, on the 15th the Germans broke through on the Meuse, on the 17th they occupied **Brussels**, on the 18th they captured **Amiens** and reached Antwerp.

New Zealand's effort to adjust her politics to the new situation was launched on the evening of Sunday 19 May, when statements by the two leaders began a week of bitter and confused controversy. On the one hand, Adam Hamilton as Leader of the Opposition vigorously associated the National Party with the criticism of government policy that had been expressed by various people and groups during the previous week. 'The country,' he said, was 'becoming increasingly uneasy about the shilly-shallying of the Government and its apparent ineptitude in checking the fall of primary production and the drift in industrial and financial matters.' The National Party had previously refrained from criticism as far as possible in order to enable the Government to devote its full attention to the war effort but this had been misunderstood, and 'having been deprived of the opportunity of placing our views before the country in Parliament assembled in the usual constitutional way, the National Party will in future exercise its right to discuss publicly Government policy in relation to the war effort <sup>1</sup>.' On the other hand, an



oddly inept broadcast by the Prime Minister on the same night gave ammunition to those who said that New Zealand was in desperate need of effective leadership. There was little of inspiration in Fraser's generalities, or of challenge in his specific proposals. He announced that members of the Territorial Force would be given periods of training ranging from three to five months, and that new measures would be introduced to overcome the farm-labour shortage. These latter included a reduction of public works and an increase in subsidies to be paid to farmers who took on untrained men. One passage in his speech which was to arouse sharp criticism was a tribute 'to the waterside workers at **Lyttelton** who had loaded an overseas liner on Saturday and Sunday when they realised it was essential work and those at **Wanganui** who had also worked during the weekend <sup>2</sup>.' These were not the words the community was waiting for.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 20 May 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Christchurch Press*, 20 May 1940; *Standard*, 23 May 1940.

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Mr Fraser's speech was indeed pedestrian and wide of the mark for a leader who was usually acute in gauging the public mood; and his deficiencies on this occasion were highlighted by a comparison most difficult for any orator to sustain. On Monday morning by New Zealand time Mr Churchill made his first broadcast as Prime Minister. 'After the battle in **France** abates its force then will come the battle for our island. For all that **Britain** is, and all that **Britain** means-that will be the struggle. In that supreme emergency we shall not hesitate to take every step, even the most drastic, to call forth from our people the last ounce or the last inch of effort of which they are capable. Interests of property and hours of labour are nothing compared to the struggle for life and honour, for right and freedom to which we have vowed ourselves <sup>1</sup>.' In New Zealand, as in England, it was the oratory of Churchill that struck the right note for the urgent mood of May 1940.

In New Zealand, however, in the absence of actual and immediate danger this sense of urgency produced results notably less heroic than in England. The statements by Hamilton and Fraser touched off an explosion of anti-government criticism whose violence is explicable only in emotional terms: forces of opposition had been long pent up, and the shock of disaster in **Europe** was accentuated by the frustrating impossibility of doing anything but watch and listen. By Tuesday the public opinion, or the newspapers and representative individuals who claimed to express it, was in full cry against the Government. In this campaign genuine patriotism seemed inextricably interwoven with political prejudice and economic interest. Much of the comment was frankly political in flavour on both sides. Hamilton gave the signal, wrote the *Standard*,<sup>2</sup> and 'within two days anti-Labour organisations in every part of the Dominion sprang into action, columns of anonymous letters attacking the Government filled the newspapers, all sorts of individuals notorious for their anti-Labour outlook were being interviewed by the newspapers, the Prime Minister was being lampooned in cartoons, and new organisations with Fascist ideas were coming into existence.'

Yet criticism had a basis broader than party. The *Standard's* reference to the 'new organisations with Fascist ideas', for instance, was a hit at the National Service Movement which had been founded at **Auckland** earlier in the week. It is true that the convenor and chairman of the committee which set up the movement was Mr **B. H. Kingston**,<sup>3</sup> who had just received, as a conservative newspaper put it,<sup>4</sup> a 'full measure of Nationalist support' as independent

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 20 May 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Standard*, 30 May 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *NZ Herald*, 21 May 1940.

candidate for Auckland West. However, the organisation was not entirely confined to the usual opponents of the Government. Among those who addressed its first mass meeting in **Auckland** on 23 May were the Rev. P. Gladstone Hughes, Moderator of the Auckland Presbytery, who explicitly dissociated himself from the National Party, and Mr **F. W. Schramm**, the Labour MP for Auckland East.

This meeting was large and emotional, and in the latter half of the week similar meetings organised by influential citizens in towns throughout the country demanded conscription, a coalition, the internment of all enemy aliens and the suppression of subversive propaganda. Sometimes anxiety touched on hysteria-particularly over the question of enemy aliens. Thus on 21 May a provincial paper observed that it would like to see an organised defence force in every town in New Zealand, armed and ready for any eventuality. **Norway** was captured by 1500 Nazis without the great forts at **Oslo**, considered impregnable in the event of an attack from the sea, firing a shot. It would be a tremendous blow to **Britain** if, at the moment, **Australia** and New Zealand fell to a blitzkrieg from within <sup>1</sup>.' At one stage the Leader of the Opposition actually advocated the indiscriminate internment of all Germans, <sup>2</sup> but more important than such eccentricities was the quality of the emotion generated around the mass meetings of the latter part of the week. That held at **Wanganui** on Friday, 24 May 1940, may serve as an example:

Remarkable evidence of the refusal by an overwhelming majority of New Zealanders to tolerate any discordant note in the demand for vigorous leadership and action in the present crisis was seen in **Wanganui** today at a great public meeting in the Opera House, convened by the Wanganui Branch of the Returned Soldiers' Association. When a motion calling on the Government to form a National Cabinet was submitted to the meeting two members of the audience attempted to

move amendments. The vast majority of the audience, however, would have none of them and repeated attempts by the movers to speak were drowned by waves of cheering, booing and counting out.

The building was packed to the doors and many hundreds who were unable to gain admission stood outside and listened to the speeches through loud-speakers. **Wanganui** business men had agreed to close their premises for an hour to enable their staffs to attend the meeting. Upward of 200 returned soldiers, with the Wanganui Pipe Band, paraded at the Drill Hall to march in a procession to the Opera House, and 100 delegates to the Farmers' Union conference also marched in fours behind the returned soldiers. <sup>3</sup>.

When all over New Zealand men 12,000 miles from threat of immediate attack behaved like this, sober assessment became difficult, and official spokesmen were bitterly criticised for complacency.

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<sup>1</sup> *Taumarunui Press*, 21 May 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 22 May 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 25 May 1940.

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This uncharacteristic excitement mounted to a climax at the end of the week, stimulated by shocks of unprecedented character from overseas. New Zealand was watching with horror an unexampled dissolution of established securities. Later disasters were of even greater magnitude, and set new standards for fear and prolonged tension: the fall of **France**, the titanic drama of the German thrust and failure in **Russia**, the smashing of the American fleet at **Pearl Harbour**, the onrush of Japanese conquest, and the advent of the atomic age. In the perspective of 1940, however, the events of this third week in May acquired a truly catastrophic momentum. On Wednesday the 22nd the evening papers reported the German communique announcing that the

French Ninth Army had been scattered and Arras, **Amiens** and Abbeville captured. On the following day came the news of the British Emergency Powers (Defence) Act placing all persons and property in the **United Kingdom** at the disposal of the State. On Friday the 24th it was revealed that the communications of the British Army in **France** were endangered.

On that day, as an emotional climax was being reached, the Government acted. In the morning the caucus of the parliamentary Labour Party met as had been arranged before the crisis broke. When it adjourned for lunch Fraser announced that Parliament was to meet on the following Thursday, 30 May, when legislation on the lines of the British Emergency Powers Bill would be introduced. Asked to explain the full significance of this statement, Fraser replied disingenuously that the meaning was quite clear. 'All forms of property and institutions as well as every person in the Dominion, would be at the disposal of the country for the prosecution of New Zealand's war effort to a successful conclusion <sup>1</sup>.' Similarly, when he was asked by the President of the RSA, William Perry, 'Can I tell my executive this morning that the proposals to come before Parliament next week mean compulsory, universal, national service, civil, military, and financial?' his reply was canny: 'Yes, definitely, as required <sup>2</sup>.' The Government was in fact adopting the British precedent as the best way out of a difficult situation. To take the widest possible powers and proclaim the intention of using them was, in the short run at least, an effective answer to those who complained of an insufficient war effort, but were less enthusiastic about increased state powers over property than about conscription of manpower. On the other hand, the comprehensive and vague character of the proposals was likely to sweeten the pill of conscription for members of the Labour Party.

There was, of course, one glaring difference between the situation in the **United Kingdom** and that in New Zealand. In the United

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 24 May 1940.

Kingdom the new powers would be exercised by a national government representing the three main political parties. It was only to be expected therefore that their introduction in New Zealand would intensify local pressure for a comparable political arrangement. This pressure was already strong, for it was in accordance with a decision made before the announcement of the Government's plans that Hamilton and Coates called on Fraser on Friday afternoon. 'Owing to the gravity of the war situation and the growing expression of great uneasiness in the minds of people of all ranks throughout New Zealand,' said Hamilton, 'I deemed it wise to tell the Prime Minister that in this emergency he should form a national Government.' He explained further that in the Opposition's view this move was made 'all the more essential' by the Government's newly announced plans. 'To say that New Zealand can be satisfied by a national emergency administration of such a drastic nature, without a national Government, is in my opinion the grossest form of misjudgement and folly <sup>1</sup>.'

The issue was now squarely raised. Over the weekend the external clamour abated, and behind closed doors cabinet and the Government defined its policy. The result was broadcast to the people by the Prime Minister on Sunday evening, 26 May. What he now had to say was very different both in content and in tone from what he had said just a week before. The difference was a reflection of the momentous events of that week and of the heat of agitation within New Zealand; and it showed a new strength in leadership.

The broadcast made it clear that the Government was taking virtually unlimited powers to dispose of New Zealand's men and resources in the national interest. Compulsion-including conscription-was envisaged. The new powers, however, would be exercised only as required. 'Those words "as required" mean that no steps will be taken unless they are needed; no steps will be taken without adequate

consideration and the necessary organisation.' Nevertheless, declared Peter Fraser, 'Such conditions as will hamper our effort will be overwhelmed. If longer hours are necessary, the people of the Dominion will face up to that necessity, for only by such means can we maintain and retain the conditions of living that we have won. Every person in the Dominion, every atom of the country's services, must be subordinated to the requirements of the Dominion and the British Commonwealth. The sacrifices asked for may be great ....' The Prime Minister then touched on the Opposition's request for a national government, which had been discussed with his

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 27 May 1940.

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followers; and he announced the decision to form 'a representative war council to be in charge of war activity, and consisting of the Cabinet Ministers associated with the war effort, representatives of the Opposition, and of industrial employers, the trades unions and the farmers.' The 'necessary powers' would be given to this body and it would hold joint sessions with cabinet.

Finally the Prime Minister dealt with the home front. 'Subversive propaganda' would be suppressed. 'People who malign the Allies will be stopped. The leaflets which have been flooding the Dominion have not done much harm, but the people and the Government are in no mood to stand any more of it, and we will put a stop to it. Anyone who stands in the way will be swept aside.' At the same time the Government's more violent critics of the previous week were sharply rebuked. 'The vituperative abuse that was poured forth came from those who have always been, and are, the bitterest opponents of the Government, and who have objected to every reform that has been enacted for the amelioration of the people of the Dominion .... The Government, returned by a majority of the people, ... will not be overawed by clamour



and will not give way to mob rule ....' 'Let the people remember,' he added, 'that we are not in a general election, but in a war to determine the future of civilisation. Let the criticism be keen; let the critics show a willingness to help; and let them do so in a friendly spirit of co-operation.'

The Prime Minister's broadcast left his critics not silent, but much less vociferous. It did in fact announce decisions that to some extent put their minds to rest on the questions which had been agitating them, and-equally important-this was done resolutely, confidently, and without any air of bowing before the storm. Indeed this manner was not unjustified. The public uproar of May 1940 helped to free the Prime Minister's hand by counterbalancing the effects of pressure from within the Labour Party. Without it the no-conscription pledge of two months earlier might have proved an inheritance very embarrassing sooner or later to the Government in its deployment of the country's manpower.

The following week brought even greater disasters in **Europe**: for the Belgian army surrendered, and it soon became clear that the British Expeditionary Force was endeavouring to escape from **Dunkirk**. Alarm at such news no longer converted itself into resentment towards the **New Zealand Government**, but it was in the shadow of unprecedented calamities abroad that Peter Fraser completed a delicate manoeuvre in internal politics. The new equilibrium established by his policy statements was subject to two obvious dangers. The first was that the Government's proposals, especially the implication of conscription and the admission of the Opposition to a share in administering the war effort, might have gone too far for the Labour movement outside Parliament. The second was that the offer of a war council might not have gone far enough for the Nationalists and that there might be in consequence a renewal of the agitation of the third week of May. The situation was precarious, and a false step might have produced political chaos.

The first danger proved the less serious. In the Labour Party,



opposition to conscription had lost its diehard core earlier in the year, and even if it had not, it could hardly have stood against the storm now blowing. It is true that there were initial signs of hesitation. The Emergency Regulations Bill embodying the new powers passed through Parliament without difficulty, but during the debate in the House of Representatives most of the Labour speakers steered clear of the word 'conscription', and Clyde Carr's attitude no doubt reflected the regrets of many others. He supported the Bill but pinned his faith to the saving phrase 'as required', declaring that he did not believe conscription *would* be required and that he was utterly opposed to it. <sup>1</sup> Regret, and even outright opposition were expressed, too, by speakers at the emergency conferences of the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party which were summoned (as had been promised would be done in such circumstances) in the first week of June. The traditional left-wing case, regarding war as an extension of the class-struggle and conscription as compulsion to fight the wrong enemy, did not go by default; it was expressed, answered with some vigour, and rejected by a great majority.

The Government, supported by the office-holders of the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party, frankly asked for a free hand to deal with a desperate situation. No secret was made of the intention to introduce conscription, on which, indeed, the Prime Minister had been sufficiently clear during the parliamentary debate. <sup>2</sup> He was now asked whether the Government intended to differentiate between home defence and overseas military service; he said that 'Our front line trenches are in **Flanders**. Conscription for home service has merged right into the question of overseas service <sup>3</sup>.' When asked if the Government did not consider it should have taken a referendum to obtain a mandate for conscription he replied: 'When a house is on fire no one needs a mandate to fight the fire. When the country's very existence for the future is at stake, no other mandate than the necessity is required to conscript anything and everything <sup>4</sup>.' He insisted on a free hand, too, in dealing

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 257, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> *Standard*, 6 Jun 1940.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

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with the Opposition: at the Labour Party conference, 'without a moment's hesitation and with great firmness', he refused to accept any commitment not to form a national government. <sup>1</sup> On the other hand, great emphasis was placed on the Government's determination to demand from the rest of the community sacrifices equal to those made by the workers. 'It is no question of the Government taking the super-profit from employers,' Mr Nash assured the delegates. 'We intend to take all the profits except for the proviso that we must be reasonable with the people who are dependent on profits or interest for their existence <sup>2</sup>.' Both conferences by overwhelming majorities gave the Government the mandate it sought to take whatever action was necessary for the effective prosecution of the war.

Fraser's dealings with the Nationalists were to prove much more difficult. The project of a war council, he said later, had been under consideration before there was any demand for a national government. He seems to have been particularly attracted by the opportunity it offered of giving a voice to economic groups not represented as such in Parliament. <sup>3</sup> On the council, as proposed by Fraser to the Opposition on 28 May, there were to be six cabinet ministers and three members of the Opposition. Primary and secondary industries were each to be represented by an employers' and a workers' representative and there was to be one person nominated by the NZRSA and one returned soldier selected by the Government. <sup>4</sup> The powers of the council were to be much the same as those eventually given to the War Cabinet.

This proposal was unanimously rejected by the National Party caucus on 29 May. <sup>5</sup> Apart from the division of powers with the

domestic cabinet which was later to prove a stumbling block in negotiations over the War Cabinet, the composition of the council itself was unacceptable; one sharp critic, F. W. Doidge, spoke in Parliament of 'a cumbersome War Council of fifteen members, half of whom will not be members of Parliament-that is to say, persons who will not come forward on the vote of the people, but will be there at the invitation of the Prime Minister ... <sup>6</sup>.' The Opposition, however, did not go so far as to vote against the Government's 'all-in legislation'. Having made its protest against the handing over of virtually dictatorial powers to a single-party cabinet, it allowed the Emergency Regulations Amendment Bill to pass without a division. Mr **J. A. Lee** failed to find a seconder for an amendment

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 4 Jun 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Standard*, 6 June 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p.86.

<sup>4</sup> *Dominion*, 30 May 1940.

<sup>5</sup> *Christchurch Press*, 30 May 1940.

<sup>6</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 37.

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that the House should give the Bill its second reading 'when there has been inserted therein provision for the taking of a referendum before conscripting men for service overseas <sup>1</sup>.'

There was still pressure for a two-party cabinet, and negotiations continued. On 12 June, the morrow of **Italy's** entrance into the war, the caucus of the Labour Party broke through one of the main obstacles by approving an invitation to two Opposition members to act (without

portfolio) on a War Cabinet with Government members. This War Cabinet was to deal only with service matters and its scope would thus have been less extensive than had been that proposed for the war council. It was still proposed to set up a war council, but 'In the event of the War Cabinet being established the functions of the War Council will necessarily be consultative and advisory'.<sup>2</sup> The new overture, however, was promptly rejected by the Nationalists; they had no taste for what Hamilton called an 'uninspiring, cumbersome trinity of control and advice.' Apart from their objections to the complicated division of powers and the withholding of portfolios from their representatives, they felt that 'Because the all-important questions of production, finance, and man-power are completely excluded from the functions of the War Cabinet, its main purpose ... is defeated'.<sup>3</sup>

The Prime Minister reacted with considerable anger to this rejection of the Government's plan. Perhaps he had experienced difficulty in persuading his followers to accept so clear a reversal of Labour tradition, and it became clear in discussion that he would have been content to allow the new War Cabinet in practice to extend greatly the field of its work. Yet there the matter rested, with some mutual irritation. Meantime, the overseas disasters culminated in the collapse of **France**, and in serious discussion as to whether or not **Britain** could continue the war alone. In a statement on 19 June—just after the loss of RMS **Niagara** near **Auckland** harbour had brought the war very close to New Zealand's thinking—the Prime Minister gave Parliament the gist of the cables on this momentous problem. In a telegram to Churchill on 15 June, he reported, 'We said that whatever the decision of His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, in these most difficult circumstances, it would be understood, accepted and supported by us to the very end .... The fact that the people of the **United Kingdom** were much nearer events and consequently much more likely to bear the brunt of enemy attack was, we said,

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 257, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser to Hamilton, 13 Jun 1940, quoted by Hamilton, *NZPD*, Vol. 257, pp. 168–9. The War Council was set up on 18 June. Its 14 members did not include any Nationalist representatives, though Fraser said the invitation to them to nominate three still stood.— *Christchurch Press*, 19 Jun 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 168.

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never absent from our minds, nor was the fact that we were a small and distant people.’ However, ‘As His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** had decided to fight on, then we, too, pledged this Dominion to remain with it to the end <sup>1</sup>.’ Though Fraser was undoubtedly expressing the feeling of the House when he said on this occasion that ‘if personal and factional considerations cannot be set aside then we are not great enough to retain our liberty’, <sup>2</sup> yet there was still no agreement as to the practical implications of this sentiment and the Imprest Supply Debate which followed the Prime Minister's eloquent statements was acrimonious in tone. The very gravity of the situation left the party leaders and their supporters the more exasperated at what seemed to them the irresponsibility of their political opponents.

Negotiations continued, however, among those who wished so far as possible to eliminate party politics from matters concerning the war, and on 16 July Fraser was able to announce the formation of a War Cabinet consisting of Coates, Hamilton, Jones, Nash and himself. Its scope was not to be restricted to the services but it was also to make decisions concerning ‘production for war purposes, war finance requirements, emergency regulations so far as they apply to the war effort and generally to implement the policy of Parliament in relation to New Zealand's participation in the war <sup>3</sup>.’ Nationalist objections to the earlier proposal had been met by a formal extension of the War Cabinet's powers; but it was clear that the domestic cabinet was to function as before for matters not directly connected with the war effort. Moreover, despite Opposition criticisms, the war council, now an advisory body, had been setup as planned.

**Broadly speaking, therefore, the plan outlined in the Prime Minister's national broadcast of 26 May was achieved. On the one hand, the most drastic powers had been taken into the Government's hands. By the Emergency Regulations Amendment Act, the authority already granted to the Governor-General was now to 'include power by Order in Council to make such emergency regulations making provision for requiring persons to place themselves, their services, and their property at the disposal of His Majesty as appear to the Governor-General to be necessary or expedient for securing the public safety, the defence of New Zealand, the maintenance of public order or the efficient prosecution of any war in which His Majesty may be engaged, or for maintaining supplies or services essential to the life of the community.' It would have been hard to draft a more comprehensive basis for**

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**<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 257, p. 205.**

**<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 207.**

**<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 512.**

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**the 'constitutional autocracy <sup>1</sup>' under which New Zealand was to live for the next five years.**

**Increased governmental powers were associated by many people with the notion of a 'national' government. On 26 May the Prime Minister had clearly foreshadowed the Opposition's participation in administration, and the complex negotiations that followed were concerned to define this participation in terms effective enough to satisfy the Government's opponents, without causing too sharp a reaction from the Government's supporters. The upshot was a War Cabinet, a domestic cabinet, and a war council: an illogical and potentially disastrous arrangement. At an early stage in negotiations, however, Fraser had argued powerfully that the effectiveness of such institutions depended less upon their formal character and relationships**

than on the men who composed them and the purpose which they strove to fulfil; <sup>2</sup> and the new War Cabinet brought together men for whom logic was subordinate to work to be done. Long before negotiations were successful, Gordon Coates had made a moving statement on the floor of the House. He said frankly that by all the rules of party warfare he ought to regard Peter Fraser as his bitterest opponent, and think of him with keen resentment, but in fact he could find no such resentment in his heart, and thought that the Prime Minister had given a fine lead to the country. Criticism could and did follow; but the war effort took precedence. <sup>3</sup> With leaders on both sides often—though not always—able to take such an attitude, the War Cabinet worked effectively. As had perhaps been anticipated, its field of activity widened as the needs of the war effort came more and more to dominate New Zealand's life. In March 1942, for example, the Prime Minister said that '90 per cent of the country's administration was now in the hands of the War Cabinet <sup>4</sup>.' In that cabinet two leading members of the Opposition were of course full members, and there is reason to believe not only that party considerations were generally eliminated from its proceedings, but that relations between it and the Government cabinet were surprisingly good. <sup>5</sup>

The new arrangement was, however, regarded with something a good deal less than enthusiasm by the rank and file in both parties, and criticism was at times vocal. That within the Labour Party had little immediate political importance; those who had sought to make an issue of their leaders' conservative trend had been defeated

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase was used in a perceptive editorial in the *Wanganui Herald* of 27 May 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57 (31 May 1940).



<sup>4</sup> *Evening Post*, 31 Mar 1942.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *NZPD*, Vol. 259, p. 83 (March 1941).

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before the war opened up in the west. Party discipline generally held firm, though sometimes at the cost of inflicting frustration on the enthusiastic. Within the National Party the position was different.

Since the defeat of 1938 there had been signs that powerful elements within the party felt that Coates and Hamilton were irretrievably involved in the public mind with the 'depression government' of 1931–35, and that the National Party would never return to office until it was led by men untainted by association with the disastrous past. This tendency had its implications on the question of collaboration between the Government and the Opposition. In spite of their attacks on men and measures, it was clear that Coates and Hamilton would respond readily to any appeal to place national before party interests, that their personal experience of office in times of crisis strongly disposed them towards the kind of co-operation which ministers like Fraser so evidently desired. On the other hand the younger men in the parliamentary party reflected the new trend, were unsubdued by senior office, and their adherence to the principles of economic *laissez-faire* had not been compromised by experience of the needs of depression administration and consequent adventures in state control.

In the first months of the war a distinction developed between those who were more and those who were less willing to soft-pedal party politics in wartime. When the leaders of the former group entered a War Cabinet which fell short of an over-all national government, the difference in judgment was clearly defined. According to Hamilton, 'this War Cabinet is at least a realistic approach to the ideal of unity and action which we all cherish in our hearts'.<sup>1</sup> To others it was a means by which the Opposition might be prevented from criticising adequately the activities of the Labour cabinet, which remained the Government for all



**purposes not directly connected with the war. These fears were expressed both in Parliament and in the press,<sup>2</sup> and the problem was seriously discussed as to whether Adam Hamilton, as a member of the War Cabinet, was an effective leader of the Opposition. There was, it seems, a considerable group of younger members of the party which was doubtful as to the wisdom of having a War Cabinet at all, and which thought that, in spite of Hamilton and Coates having joined it, 'the Opposition should not sacrifice any of its critical privileges<sup>3</sup>.' A generally well-informed newspaper went so far as to name S. G. Holland, the member for **Christchurch****

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<sup>1</sup> **Christchurch Press**, 22 Jul 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 574; *Press*, 19 Jul 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *Press*, 19 Jul 1940

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**North, as this group's prospective nominee for leadership of the party.**

**Such reports were denied, yet they gave an indication of trends. The achievement of a two-party War Cabinet was a Pyrrhic victory for the 'old guard' of the National Party; it represented a type of co-operation which that party was about to repudiate. Accordingly, it achieved less than had been looked for by the Prime Minister and the then Leader of the Opposition alike. Yet it proved an efficient instrument of New Zealand's will to fight.**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 12 – AWKWARD MINORITIES

## CHAPTER 12

### *Awkward Minorities*

**THE explosive experiences of mid-1940 were followed in New Zealand by a period oddly reminiscent of the slackness which had preceded Hitler's attack on the West. In spite of occasional activities by raiders in the Pacific, the war remained remote from New Zealand. Its impact was one of words rather than deeds; and apart from those actually serving overseas, the country was concerned primarily with two not very stimulating forms of activity: the working out in detail of policies adopted in haste, and the continuance of normal forms of work, under greater difficulties and with more urgency, but without the stimulus of danger and of extensive change. The result was that issues great and small tended to become confused, and matters of no great intrinsic importance demanded undue attention. Overseas news indeed remained calamitous, but lacked climax. Men could not live perpetually tense; they became hardened to existence on the edge of disaster, and fearful news from abroad, while it sharpened tempers, ceased to be an urgently compelling factor in domestic politics. The gap accordingly widened between the needs, as apprehended and expounded by the leaders, and the emotional convictions of ordinary men. It was a long, uphill pull undertaken with determination; but when there were sharp reactions, they sometimes had a faint note of hysteria rather than of exaltation.**

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**Wherever else opinions differed after June 1940 there was at least agreement on the need for conscription. Agreement in principle extended compulsion, as required, to economic resources and the assignment of civilian labour. In these fields, however, qualifications quickly entered in, and adequate precedent and administrative machinery was lacking. Conscription of men, however, meant the revival of familiar practices. It could be organised smoothly, and it met a popular demand for equality of sacrifice in the field traditionally regarded as the most significant—men in khaki marching in the Empire's**

battles. Voluntary enlistment accordingly ceased on 22 July 1940. Thereafter the men required were chosen by ballot from men of the appropriate class. Before very long the word 'ballot' became misleading: all those within certain categories were called to the colours unless some cause—medical, conscientious, or the public importance of a man's peacetime activities—was held to indicate otherwise. Appeals against military service could be made by men called up, or by others on their behalf.

Politically, conscription presented some problems that were awkward in principle, even if they bulked small, when measured in material terms, in the national picture. The possibility that its enforcement would raise a major political conflict vanished when the Labour Party as a whole accepted the new policy. That policy, wrote the *Standard ingenuously*, 'provides for conscription of everything and everybody—which is what the Labour movement has always urged <sup>1</sup>.' Yet difficulties remained. It was not always easy, for example, to determine whether a fit man was more use in the forces than on a farm or in a factory or a scientist's laboratory. Much more serious, however, was the problem of conscientious objection, which seemed for many minds to be a test case for the preservation of liberty in wartime.

The attitude of the leaders of the Government was clear and dignified. Peter Fraser said plainly that he could not personally understand the position of the absolute pacifist, but must respect it. If a man was genuine and sincere, and had not manufactured his conscience for the occasion, there should be no persecution. <sup>2</sup> Walter Nash said with equal frankness that he had once been a pacifist but had changed his mind; events during the depression years and the rise of Hitlerism convinced him that there were evils which had to be resisted by force. <sup>3</sup> Both these men, who were at the core of policy-making, respected the conscience of those who sincerely differed from them on such an issue. It was clear, however, that the Government would not recognise as 'conscientious objection' the views of those who admitted that warfare might sometimes be necessary, but claimed that they could not

**conscientiously fight in the particular war then being waged. 'The person he was concerned about and wished to meet in every possible way,' said the Prime Minister, <sup>4</sup> 'was the person who conscientiously believed that it was wrong to take life in any circumstances whatsoever. The test of a man's sincerity was that he was prepared to suffer or be killed himself rather than do what he thought wrong.' After a year's experience, official policy was explained in explicitly**

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**<sup>1</sup> *Standard*, 30 May 1940.**

**<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 Jun 1940.**

**<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.***

**<sup>4</sup> To a deputation from the Christian Pacifist Society on 18 Nov 1940.**

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**generous terms by the Minister of Justice, H. G. R. Mason, on 23 May 1941. 'It is the earnest desire of Government,' he said to a gathering of Crown representatives and secretaries of Appeal Boards, 'that Appeal Boards should prevent the coward and the slacker from sheltering under a convenient conscience invented to meet the exigencies of the present situation; but it is equally the earnest desire of Government that every consideration be extended to the objector who is sincere. To this end the standard of proof should not be harsh. Until and unless an appellant shows himself to lack sincerity, he should be handled by a friendly examination rather than by a rigorous cross-examination .... The examination should not generally involve deep and complex ethical considerations. The Boards should seek to find a simple sincerity, a real genuine belief. It is, of course, important that the dishonest or the insincere should be detected, but if as a result of a Board's investigation a few slip through who ought not, this will be better than that the genuine man should fail.'**

The difficult task of pronouncing on the sincerity of conscientious objectors fell initially upon nine of the Appeal Boards, which dealt with all appeals against compulsory service in the chief towns of the country. These were judicial bodies of three men, including a lawyer chairman, aided by a Crown representative, and were charged to discover whether or not an appellant 'holds a genuine belief that it is wrong to engage in warfare in any circumstances.' In the nature of things, no precise rules could be laid down for their guidance. Long-standing membership of a pacifist religious body such as the Society of Friends was in 1940 instanced as acceptable evidence as to a man's convictions, but even this was omitted in the following year to avoid the suggestion that such membership was essential to sustain an appeal; it was expressly provided in 1941 that a Board could accept an appellant's own account of himself even if there were no corroborating evidence. In essence, although the forms were legal, and the executive officers were lawyers, the Boards had an almost unlimited discretion; nor was there any appeal against their decisions. In typically New Zealand fashion the effective administration of a centrally formulated policy was placed in the hands of almost independent local authorities.<sup>1</sup> The wishes, even the written directives, of the Government cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of the policies actually adopted in administration.

During five years of conscription 306,000 men were called up for service, and of them over 5100 lodged appeals on grounds of conscientious objection. In round figures, 3000 of such appeals

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<sup>1</sup> Emergency Regulations 1940/117 and Amendment No. 4, 1941/73. Memorandum, Director of National Service to Minister, 10 Mar 1941.

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were actually heard by Appeal Boards: 600 (20 per cent) were allowed; 1200 (40 per cent) were dismissed, subject to the men concerned being called upon only for non-combatant duties; and 1200 (40 per cent) were dismissed outright.<sup>1</sup> Of the second two groups, whose appeals had not been allowed, two-thirds accepted the position and—no doubt in some

**cases in grave distress—did what was required of them. Eight hundred refused and became military defaulters, offenders against the law. For them, there was no right of appeal, and, officially speaking, no sympathy. These figures are not large: indeed, they testify to the community's overwhelming agreement, and show that many people who held scruples at the prospect of war served without protest when the call came. Yet the dilemma posed for the community by the appeals was none the less a difficult and important one, and it can scarcely be said to have been faced.**

**The men appointed to Appeal Boards were necessarily drawn mainly from the older, more established, respectable and conventional sections of the community, men who represented the majority judgment and who were quite clear that this war, like the last, was unquestionably just, and unquestionably to be fought by the same basic methods to a victorious conclusion. Those who appeared before them were of a different generation. Some, no doubt, consciously or otherwise sought an easy way out of a moral dilemma and a physical danger. At the other end of the scale were men of settled and mature religious convictions. Among those who had recently reached the age of military service, however, there were very many thoughtful men feeling their way painfully through a morass of doubt and controversy towards a clearer definition of their duties as citizens. It was not so easy for them in the nineteen-thirties as for their fathers in 1914 to feel absolute certainty as to contemporary issues, or equal confidence that successful warfare would establish moral values or even solve basic political problems. A certain scepticism was natural; and many a young man faced an agonising struggle when the community demanded he should kill in the name of peace. No doubt such men were in a small minority in any case, and of them many quietly conformed rather than face the ordeal of public inquiry. Those who did push the matter to a conclusion had to prove their case to men who, however anxious to be fair, were of a different world, and who were most of them convinced that conscientious objection to war was a position**

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<sup>1</sup> The percentage of appeals allowed in the **United Kingdom** was higher. See Hayes, *Challenge of Conscience*, pp. 382–3. Also, comparison is difficult owing to the absence of special provision in the **United Kingdom** for defaulters' detention. Objectors who persisted after their appeals had been rejected seem on the whole to have been treated with more leniency than in New Zealand, though there were some starting exceptions.— Hayes, *op. cit.*, *passim*, particularly p. 172.

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logically untenable, and even amounted to presumptive evidence of failure in citizenship. <sup>1</sup>

In these circumstances, the hearing of appeals became for many young men a gruelling ordeal, made all the more grim in some cases by the vigour with which some tribunals expressed their own and the community's condemnation of conscientious objection. In some cases it was widely believed that chairman and Crown representatives departed seriously from the judicial attitude prescribed for the Boards, and mature, legally trained men acted as advocates rather than as dispassionate inquirers after truth. Even an unsympathetic press made occasional protests, and the Director of National Service thought it appropriate to remind Appeal Boards in 1943 that they must not show hostility to appellants whose views they personally rejected. Proceedings, he said, 'must be clothed with both the fact and the appearance of complete impartiality <sup>2</sup>.' The Director, indeed, emphasised that he was rebuking no one in particular, but it soon became notorious that Appeal Boards differed widely in their attitudes towards conscientious objectors: the proportion of appeals allowed by the different Boards varied from 33 per cent to 14 per cent. This fact reinforced the feeling that in some areas at least the administration of the law did not conform to government policy, and that at least some young men of deep sincerity had been unfairly bullied and branded as law-breakers who were little better than traitors. The failure of the Government to grapple with this problem was, and remains, unexplained.

The allowing of his appeal entirely freed a conscientious objector from military obligation, but not from social pressure. As the war situation worsened and the armed forces suffered severe casualties feeling sometimes ran high, and those whose appeals had succeeded, or who had been declared liable to non-combatant service only, were sometimes regarded as having evaded some of the burdens of citizenship. This line of criticism was in part met in 1941, when a special tribunal was set up to ensure, on the one hand, that an appellant's 'financial position shall be no better than if he were serving as a member of the Armed Forces', and on the other, that he 'shall be employed on such work of a civil nature and under civil control as the public interest requires <sup>3</sup>.' The Tribunal worked quietly, with public support and with the co-operation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. remarks in confidential circular from Director of National Service to Appeal Boards, 30 Jul 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Director of National Service to Appeal Boards, 30 Jul 1943; *Press*, 17 Jul 1943. Cf. also remarks by Bishop of [Wellington](#) to Minister of National Service, 26 Feb 1941.

<sup>3</sup> National Service Emergency Regulations 1940, Amendment No. 5 (27 Aug 1941).

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conscientious objectors themselves, and it produced at last a respectable token result. When its operations ceased in mid-1946, some £29,000 had been collected for the Social Security Fund under its decisions from 500 men, individual contributions ranging from a few shillings a week to several hundreds of pounds a year.

Apart from financial considerations, however, there was a strong current of thought which insisted that conscientious objection to service was anti-social. There were accordingly recurrent suggestions that objectors should be dismissed, especially from employment where they might influence opinion. In particular, difficulties arose in the

**schools, and opinion grew strong among Education Boards—which represented parents—that conscientious objectors should not be allowed to remain as teachers. <sup>1</sup> The Government at first maintained that teachers should come under the same rule as anyone else, but by the end of 1941 it had deferred to pressure. Thenceforward, any teacher who appealed against service on conscientious grounds was placed on leave without pay for the duration of the war, even if the appeal were allowed. Those whose appeals were rejected and who became military defaulters could be dismissed. Altogether, 123 teachers appealed on conscientious grounds, though some of these subsequently served. In 1942 Canterbury University College Council, which also administered schools, applied the same principle to its university staff. It was the only university authority so to act.**

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**With the partial exception of the teaching profession, comparatively little difficulty arose in the community with respect to conscientious objectors whose appeals had been upheld. It was otherwise with the unhappy 800 whose appeals had been rejected, and who still refused military duties. In the First World War such men, after imprisonment, could be forcibly impressed into the Expeditionary Force, subjected to field punishments, and actually sent into the front line. Such extremities were now rejected, nor was it felt that defaulters should be equated with ordinary criminals. The attempted solution was defaulters' detention, a scheme of concentration camps designed to be less comfortable than the army but less punitive than gaol. Camps of this character were established in November 1941. <sup>2</sup> Thereafter the normal procedure was for those convicted by magistrates of being military defaulters to be sent to gaol for a period of up to three months, and then to be transferred to detention camps, with compulsory labour, for the duration of the war.**

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<sup>1</sup> Deputation from **Wellington Education Board** to Minister, 26 Aug 1941.

Defaulters' detention was an attempt to deal with an insoluble problem—a compromise disliked by all and bitterly resented by some. There were indeed a few who resisted by all non-violent means available to prisoners. The main substantial criticisms by those inclined to admit that provision had to be made for men judicially pronounced to be defaulters were three: that the labour exacted was mainly of a primitive and ineffectual kind; that in contrast with British practice, confinement was for an indefinite period; and that, again in contrast with **Britain**, there was no provision for appeal against the decisions of the Armed Forces Appeal Boards on which detention was based. The Government, however, firmly rejected offers of alternative service by defaulters, and it was not until the fighting was virtually over that anything effective was done to meet the other main criticisms. Even then it did not admit the possibility that Appeal Boards' original decisions could have been mistaken. In June 1945, however, it set up Revision Authorities empowered to release on parole a defaulter who could convince an Authority that he held 'a conscientious belief that would prevent his participation in war', and who would undertake to participate in no activity prejudicial to the war effort or to the public interest. There was no appeal from an Authority's decision, but an applicant who had been rejected could re-apply for consideration.

Two distinguished lawyers were appointed to act independently as Revision Authorities, and began work in June 1945. Four hundred and seventy-six men, three-quarters of those then detained, submitted themselves to a Revision Authority, and of them 283 were released. A number of others were also released because age or medical grading put them out of the categories required by the Army. At the end of March 1946, however, 259 men were still in custody. Defaulter detention ceased finally on 20 May 1946.

Public clamour, the necessity to maintain national morale, the

desirability of blunting criticism from political opponents and the RSA—these factors inevitably influenced government policy and complicated its assessment of the public interest. Administrative policy tended to soften issues where possible. The Army's initial insistence that those allotted to non-combatant duties had no guarantee that they would not be called upon to fight was overruled, for instance. In contrast with the First World War administration was in the hands of civilian departments, and it was ruled that appeals on grounds of conscientious objection should not be heard until any other appeal had been disposed of, and the doctors had pronounced an appellant as fit for overseas service. On the other hand, the Government yielded to public pressure in respect of teachers, was unsympathetic to suggestions of alternative service by those whose appeals had once been rejected, and refused to allow cases to be reconsidered. Moreover, defaulters, including those released by the Revision Authorities as being genuine conscientious objectors, were still disenfranchised in 1946. <sup>1</sup>

#### IV

Objection to war was not only a matter of individual conscience, which was focused by conscription, but of public action; for there were those who claimed the right not only to oppose New Zealand's participation in war, but to endeavour, as citizens, to convert the community to their way of thinking. This claim necessarily brought established political principles into conflict. If the will of the majority is to prevail, minorities must loyally accept policies of which they disapprove, until such time as they have converted themselves into a majority. Yet an endeavour to have a policy changed in the future may very readily be confused, both by the public and by the Government, with an effort to obstruct the present enforcement of a policy which in the meantime represents the will of an overwhelming majority of the people. On the other hand, as the fruit of prolonged political struggle and sacrifice, British political practice recognised that there were limits to the State's authority over the individual. Liberty was something more fundamental than the right to participate in formulating a national

**policy which then became binding upon all.**

**In 1940, in an atmosphere of national crisis, with insistent public demand for greater unity, these issues were raised from two contrasting directions, and in forms embarrassing to men with British background and ideas. On the one hand, the small Communist party continued its sharp but unconstructive criticism both of the general direction and the detailed working out of national policy; and certain pacifists indomitably proclaimed a totally different view of the citizen's duty.**

**The principles at stake were argued and the Government's attitude made plain on 18 November 1940, when a deputation from the Christian Pacifist Society headed by **O. E. Burton** met the Prime Minister. The Society's view was that, if matters came to an issue, it must bear witness to its beliefs, come what may. Those who believed in war had full right to express themselves, which those who rejected it had not. Members of the Society were convinced that the best interests of the country and of mankind were bound up with the propagation of the ideas which they sincerely held. Even if New Zealand were invaded, said their spokesman, he hoped that,**

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<sup>1</sup> Official statement in *Evening Post*, 6 Nov 1946.

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**by patience and suffering, Christians could conquer the malignant minds of the Dominion's enemies. In this time of crisis, therefore, members of the Society were willing to perform the most disagreeable, even hazardous public service, but insisted on the right to proclaim their faith. Without haste or secrecy they proposed to continue their teaching. In reply, the Prime Minister was sympathetic but practical. Room could be found for an individual conscientious objector who would perform alternative service, 'but when a person believed it his job to convince people that the war was wrong, a conflict inevitably arose. The State was representing the general consensus of opinion of the people, and was compelled to uphold these views. They could not permit anything which was subversive of the country's war effort.... It was**

necessary for the Government to prevent the expounding of doctrines which would strike at the foundations of the State. In their view it was preferable to suffer a temporary handicap in regard to expression of opinion rather than a permanent extinction of freedom of opinion.' The Society's minority opinion was, he said, entitled to respect; the great problem was to prevent it from being penalised for its views, without injuring the country's effort to carry out the policy on which it was determined.

No reconciliation in viewpoint proved possible. The Society for some time forbore to organise street meetings, its only method of gaining a public hearing. In March 1941, however, it announced its decision to resume such meetings, whether or not they should be prohibited. 'Free men preserve their freedom only by exercising it. It can not be defended by violence in the desert, but only by resolute men standing and toiling for their convictions here and now.' Week by week speakers were put up by the Society and one by one were arrested and imprisoned.

Meantime, prompter and more drastic action had been taken against more directly political forms of opposition, and against propaganda more closely approximating to usual conceptions of subversion. In accordance with the promise to put a stop to subversive publications, new and extremely drastic amendments to the Censorship and Publicity Regulations were announced on 29 May 1940. These gave the Attorney-General power to order the seizure of any printing press if he was 'satisfied' that it had been used for printing subversive statements and had 'reason to suspect' that it was likely to be used for printing further subversive statements. In such circumstances he could order any periodical to cease publication or prohibit any person from taking part in publishing a periodical during a specified period. Appeals against orders under these regulations could be made to a judge of the Supreme Court, but no order was to be revoked unless the judge was satisfied that 'the acts which the order was intended to prevent are not likely to be committed <sup>1</sup>.'



Under these new powers the *People's Voice* was suppressed and its press seized. Since previous prosecutions and convictions had produced little modification in the policy of the paper a good case could be made out for this drastic action. This was hardly so to the same extent with the action against *Tomorrow*. It is true that the editorial policy of this paper in the last year or so of its existence had developed along communist lines or along lines sympathetic to communism, but the magazine had not indulged in the type of tirade against the war then favoured by the *People's Voice*, and no prosecutions had been brought against it. It was an organ for the left wing of the Labour Party, and in its columns **J. A. Lee** published the articles that had earned him expulsion from the party. It was, in short, much clearer that the magazine was an annoyance and an embarrassment to the Government than that it was a menace to public morale. If the case for its suppression was a doubtful one, the mode of suppression would seem even more questionable and underlines the dangers of the powers that had just been taken. The printer, who was already in trouble with the police for issuing a pamphlet without adequate imprint, was warned by the police that his press could be seized if he used it for printing subversive matter. Accordingly, he informed the editor that he could not take the risk of continuing to print *Tomorrow* and the magazine passed out of existence.

The *People's Voice* was not easily killed. Shortly after the ban it reappeared in cyclostyled form, and sometimes under other names, in **Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch**. It circulated surreptitiously as illegal literature, stridently proclaiming the party line, and those handling it were occasionally caught and heavily punished. Nevertheless, the Communist party was not itself banned. Power to ban any organisation considered by the Attorney-General to be subversive was indeed taken by the Government on 18 June 1940,<sup>2</sup> a step arising out of the activities of pacifists and communists, but more particularly those of the National Service Movement, which rather flamboyantly accused the Government of inadequate activity. In the upshot the only organisation to be banned—and then only briefly—was that of Jehovah's



**Witnesses. In February 1941 it was suggested that the Communist party should be suppressed, and there was certainly no sympathy in the Government for its views or tactics. The behaviour of communists was, indeed, a subject on which Fraser used strong language, and in the view of officials the main danger of sabotage in 1940 was from members of the**

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**<sup>1</sup> Amendment No. 2 to Censorship and Publicity Regulations, 1940/93, 28 May 1940.**

**<sup>2</sup> Public Safety Emergency Regulations 1940, Amendment No. 1, 1940/122.**

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**party. The party's propaganda for the cessation of an 'Imperialist' war was, however, significant not because it implied any threat physically to obstruct New Zealand's fighting, but because it found some response in the uneasiness still felt by many who were critical of communism but had a radical viewpoint. The suspicion that the British government might not be unwilling to turn the fight against **Russia** died hard; and was a thread in the texture of New Zealand's thinking about foreign relations. In the end, however, no ban was issued against the party, which in September 1941 was quietly allowed to re-acquire a weekly journal.**

**This comparative tolerance was due in part to the party's unimportance. In the early days of the war it expected suppression and went partially underground, meeting in small groups, and hiding incriminating material. Nevertheless, the police knew a good deal about its activities—incidentally satisfying themselves that, contrary to current talk, it was not subsidised from abroad—and reported that membership remained small. In 1941 there were believed to be about 690 members, which was a small but not alarming increase on pre-war figures; and in 1939 the circulation of the *People's Voice* had not much exceeded 7000. In any case, drastic action against the communist organisation was not**

seriously in question after **Russia** entered the war; for the party line, though remaining critical of the Government, now insisted that the struggle against **Hitler** had become a People's War. Nevertheless, the Labour movement continued firmly to reject collaboration with the communists. In November 1941 a joint statement by the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party called on workers to 'redouble their efforts in field, factory and workshop to provide the maximum assistance to **Russia**.' The statement, however, criticised the past attitudes of the local Communist party, whose policy 'is not and never has been determined by democratic methods nor by reference to the needs and purposes of the people of New Zealand.' This vigorous statement caused some criticism, but was reaffirmed by the Federation of Labour in the following year. <sup>1</sup>

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The crisis of May 1940 and the following prolonged anxiety raised in particularly awkward form a further problem which required cool wisdom and great moral strength to reconcile the demands of justice, public interest and political expediency. The New Zealand community was not greatly experienced in dealing with groups who departed widely from the average. Even when

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<sup>1</sup> **Auckland Star**, 21 Nov 1941; *Standard*, 16 Apr 1942.

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the offenders were manifestly fellow citizens and kinsmen the community in general showed a certain blank impatience in dealing with conscientious objectors and communists; and difficulties in understanding were greater when dealing with foreigners. Suspicion was natural in an insular community, and reached panic heights in May 1940 when the press was full of stories of the manner in which small groups of Germans had infiltrated victim countries and promoted military collapse. Few New Zealanders thought that there could be 'quislings' amongst themselves, but to fear 'fifth columnists' and

campaign for precautions against them was in harmony with the feeling of the times and furnished a concrete and simply phrased demand to hurl at the Government. This was freely done, and even the Leader of the Opposition, before he became a member of War Cabinet, joined in the clamour for the internment of all 'enemy aliens'. <sup>1</sup>

Alarm had at least this germ of justification, that the German government and its agents and sympathisers had before the war done their best to create active pro-Nazi groups in the Dominion. The officials of the German consulate, it was suspected and later proved, <sup>2</sup> far exceeded their consular duties. Contact was sought with Germans of military age, and indeed with all those of German blood. Confidential information was gathered about Jewish business men. Some cultural organisations were diverted towards political activities. Able propaganda was vigorously distributed and followed up in short-wave broadcasts from **Germany**. Attempts were made to revive German sentiment in **Western Samoa**. The total result was of negligible importance, however, in peacetime, or even so long as the warfare remained geographically distant. A skeleton Nazi party was indeed created. Contacts were made with keen individuals, including some Germans who had virtually forgotten their country of origin, and contacts made, maybe, with a few sympathetic New Zealanders too. Yet, in the official view, it was hard to see what damage was likely to be done, and in any case the police had a sound enough general idea of what was going on. So far as Italians were concerned, most of them were of peasant origin. The danger, such as it was, arose essentially from poor assimilation. Though the problem was then scarcely recognised, there was a considerable element among Italian fishermen who had no enthusiasm for Mussolini's **Italy**, but likewise had little knowledge of or love for the country of their adoption.

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 22 May 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Much information was gathered from mails on hand at the outbreak of war or in transit. Documents examined included the appointment papers of the Gauleiter for New Zealand and **Samoa**.

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With this background, pre-war action was kept to a minimum. The police investigated specific cases brought to their attention, and towards the end kept a list of aliens who entered the country, but beyond this nothing systematic was known of the whereabouts, ideas and employment of aliens. Nor was the action planned by the ONS, based on experiences of the First World War, at all drastic. On the outbreak of war, all aliens over 16 years of age, together with naturalised British citizens who had once been subjects of an enemy state, were required to register with the police, unless exempted by the Attorney-General. They then had to notify changes of address, and ask permission for absences from home lasting more than twenty-four hours, and they could not work on wharves or ships. The Attorney-General could order the internment of any alien whom he judged to be disaffected, or whose liberty he thought to be a source of public danger. Policy was, however, to intern as sparingly as possible: in December 1939 nine men were interned, a number increased by the following June to 16, together with 15 men from **Western Samoa**. When Italy entered the war, 30 more men were interned, mainly from the local Fascio.

These proceedings, though no doubt adequate to a period of relative slackness, were in many ways unsatisfactory. As before the outbreak of war, the police acted only if there was some specific reason, some accusation positively made, some information gathered by postal censors and passed on. Accordingly, it could well happen that some of those men whose cases needed investigation came to no one's attention. Further, if need arose, the police gathered their information and then reported with a recommendation direct to the minister; in effect they were both prosecutors and judges. On the other hand, the system was naturally irksome to many individuals—to New Zealand residents who had long thought of themselves as ordinary loyal citizens, and to refugees who had crossed the world to avoid belonging to **Hitler's Germany**. Such persons had no chance of convincing anyone of their loyalty. Further, as soon as public attention was aroused, the system was seen to be so loose as to give no confidence that the ranks of aliens were being

**properly combed for possible disloyalty.**

**The numbers involved were still small. In September 1939 there were about 7000 unnaturalised aliens in New Zealand, of whom roughly 700 were Italians, and about 1100 were classed as European refugees. Nevertheless, judged by New Zealand standards, the last year or so of peace had brought something like an influx. In the two years ending March 1940, for example, 674 Germans and Austrians came to New Zealand, as compared with a yearly average of 37 from 1933 to 1938. Tiny as these figures were when the desperate need of Hitler's victims is remembered, enough refugees arrived to make a considerable impact on the New Zealand community. Of necessity, little was known of the new arrivals, and at a time when public feeling was tense, when all dissident minorities were intolerantly criticised, when papers were full of disasters and stories of successful spying and sabotage, and when the Government was fiercely attacked for inadequate activity, it was natural that a close check on aliens within the country should be insistently demanded.**

**The Government, while firmly rejecting the drastic solution of interning everyone, agreed with the need for action. The regulations, after some experimentation, were accordingly recast on 18 June and given more permanent form on 24 October. The basic principle now became that the case of every alien, not merely those against whom specific accusations had been made, should be studied and pronounced upon by a judicial authority. The police became gatherers of information, without the responsibility for judging it. An Aliens Authority—a local professional lawyer—was appointed in each police district, and sometimes more than one. These authorities examined every alien and all information concerning him, and reported to the minister, who still had the responsibility of decision. There was, however, a threeman Aliens Appeal Tribunal headed by a Supreme Court judge to hear appeals against the recommendations of Aliens Authorities, and to advise the Minister of Justice on any matters which he might refer to it. This machinery was set to work in November 1940 to classify all 'enemy aliens', a task completed by March 1941; it was**

then charged to examine similarly aliens drawn from non-enemy states. Classifications ranged from that recommended for immediate internment, through varying degrees of restriction, to complete exemption from alien status. While investigations were proceeding, restrictions on enemy aliens were progressively tightened, and covered, for example, firearms, maps, motor vehicles, travel and so forth.

No such system could be administered without difficulties, grave inconvenience, and injustice to individuals. Refugees resented greatly the legal designation of 'enemy alien', and pressed hard for an additional formal classification which would explicitly recognise their loyalty to the Allied cause. No solution was found to this problem. The Government, while increasingly satisfied that the great majority of refugees were perfectly genuine, refused to commit itself in respect of any particular man. Enemy aliens were necessarily exempt from conscription; and there were at times vigorous protests that aliens were flourishing, buying the property and taking over the jobs of 'our boys'. In country districts in particular, pressure on aliens was often fierce. In face of this campaign the Government held the balance with some firmness. Specific cases were investigated. Aliens were forbidden to acquire property without permission. Naturalisation was suspended, except (after 1943) for those who volunteered and were accepted for service with the armed forces. <sup>1</sup> In July 1942 Cabinet decided that aliens should be encouraged, though not compelled, to join the armed forces or civil defence organisations, and that all males between 18 and 45 should be mobilised for national service, and directed into essential industries. It was significant both that the civil defence organisations were at first extremely reluctant to accept aliens, and that, when after exhaustive inquiries the services of a considerable number of them were accepted, the anticipated friction did not develop.

Administrative difficulties were inevitably endless, in particular the problem of nationality. Citizens of the former state of [Austria](#), for example, and to a lesser extent those of other countries seized by Nazis, naturally objected to being classed as Germans. No easy way out was

found, though in the end most Austrians were regarded as 'stateless' and therefore not 'enemy aliens'. A problem of a different kind was posed by the Italian fisherman community, naturalised or not; for their occupation inevitably carried them into or near security areas. Moreover, when **Japan** entered the war evidence accumulated to confirm earlier suspicions—that some at least of this community would, albeit without much enthusiasm, co-operate with the Axis and **Japan** if, as many now anticipated, the Allies should be defeated. Some who in 1939 had declared themselves loyal to New Zealand and prepared to defend it if attacked, said in 1942 that they were neutral and would not resist an invader.

This problem was dealt with as part of the inevitable tightening up which followed early Japanese victories. The original classification of aliens in 1940–41 had included as Category B those who should be interned if New Zealand were threatened by invasion; and in December 1941 both the police and the Aliens Tribunal urged that these men should all be interned forthwith. The Government felt that this was neither necessary nor desirable, and eventually had this group subdivided into those for immediate internment; those to be interned if the Japanese occupied **New Caledonia**, **Fiji**, or **Samoa**; and those to be interned if the invasion of New Zealand itself should be attempted. This plan was approved by the Chiefs of Staff, and twenty-six men were immediately interned. Those Italians of 'B' category who were not interned were as an alternative offered work on inland vegetable farms.

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<sup>1</sup> In the three years 1942–44, about 60 aliens volunteered for the Army and 300 for the Air Force. Eventually 79 men were naturalised under this arrangement.— *Evening Post*, 10 Apr 1947.

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The control of aliens in wartime New Zealand was administered entirely by civilians up to the time when a man was interned. His custody then was a matter for the Army. An internment camp was established on **Somes Island**, in **Wellington** harbour, except for an interval in 1943–44, when it was held, in terms of the Geneva



convention of 1929, that **Wellington** might become a fighting zone. In all, 221 men were interned at one time or another, of whom 19 were subsequently deported. The largest number held at any one time was 185, in December 1942. Most of the Japanese internees were repatriated in mid-1943 as part of an exchange; and following British example, all Italian internees were released and directed to essential work shortly after **Italy** surrendered.

The internal organisation of the camp was run by the internees themselves, with little interference from the Commandant. Three camp leaders were chosen by the internees, a German, an Italian and a Japanese, together with a committee for each main group. Internees occupied themselves with gardening, maintenance work round the camp, handicrafts, music, reading. The library was drawn in the first instance from the consular libraries, purged of material specifically Nazi or Fascist. The main problem was that of relations among internees. In particular, the professedly Nazi element was at first confident of early victory, and its activities were greatly resented by others. In Britain and **Canada** self-proclaimed Nazis and Fascists were segregated from the rest because of maltreatment of anti-Nazi minorities in camps, but nothing on these lines was done on **Somes Island**. In the official view, maltreatment was minor, and 'the accepted policy was the downright British attitude that a German internee was a German, and therefore ought to stick to his country, and it was an underhand action to try to break down his pro-Nazi loyalty.' This policy bore hard on waverers and opponents of Nazi thinking, who were exposed to the full blast of Axis propaganda. For some the camp proved a school of fascism; two Samoan boys, for instance, could speak no German on internment, but emerged as convinced Nazis.

The camp was closed in October 1945, and the last forty-seven internees released.

**VI**

In view of the events of 1940 and of the probability that there were



**some, if very few, people at liberty in New Zealand who would do what they could to harm the country's war effort, it was not surprising that special action should have been taken to strengthen security arrangements. The particular action taken, however, provided an unhappy example of the dangers that attend hasty impro- visation**

**in these matters; though, in the first instance at least, the fault does not seem to have lain at the New Zealand end. In November 1940 a representative of the United Kingdom Security Intelligence Organisation transmitted to the New Zealand War Cabinet proposals for the establishment of a security intelligence service organisation in New Zealand and 'especially recommended <sup>1</sup>' that a Lieutenant Folkes be lent to New Zealand to control it. Accordingly in February 1941, Folkes, now a major, was appointed as Director of a Security Intelligence Bureau responsible directly to the Prime Minister for civil as well as military security. The Bureau never seems to have functioned satisfactorily. Apart from the circumstance that Major Folkes himself seems to have been unsuited to his responsibilities and that many of his subordinates lacked at least the training necessary for them, War Cabinet does not seem to have appreciated the extent to which the Police Department was already discharging, in an unobtrusive way, the duties projected for the new organisation. The consequence was a duplication of effort, and friction between the SIB and the police. The Security Intelligence Bureau was, in fact, received with general uneasiness and distrust. It seems to have done a certain amount of useful work in testing and providing security precautions particularly in connection with shipping and wharves, but the suspicion that it was accumulating lurid reports without the inclination to check or the capacity to evaluate them was confirmed in the most startling fashion in mid-1942. On 28 March 1942, the day following his release from Waikeria Reformatory, an individual with an extensive criminal history, including convictions for false pretences, interviewed Mr Semple with a story of having been approached by enemy agents. Semple took him to Fraser, who passed him on to Major Folkes. Over the ensuing three months he seems to**

have convinced Folkes and, it would appear, some members of War Cabinet, that four Nazi agents had arrived by submarine and were living in **Rotorua**, that contacts had been made with fifth columnists throughout the country and plans made for extensive sabotage and the assassination of leading cabinet ministers prior to the landing of an invasion force at **New Plymouth**. Meanwhile, in pursuit of the conspirators, Folkes's informant, supplied with ample funds by the SIB and accompanied by its agents, toured the **North Island**. The police were not informed, though from their observation of the individual concerned they began to discover what was happening; nor were the Chiefs of Staff until, in the closing stages, Folkes asked them for a large body of military personnel in order to round up the conspirators. He also unsuccessfully asked the Prime Minister for special

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<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSDA, 28 Nov 1940.

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powers, apparently to arrest and detain the considerable number of completely innocent people who had been accused of complicity in the affair. Fraser's suspicions were growing and, some time in July, he requested the police to investigate. They had little difficulty in exposing the affair as a hoax. Despite a devastating report on the case and on the general work of the Bureau by the Attorney-General, dated 18 September, and a Chiefs of Staff paper dated 22 December recommending the immediate dismissal of its head, it was not until 19 February that the Prime Minister wrote directing Folkes to hand over control of his organisation to Mr J. Cummings, then Superintendent of Police. For the remainder of the war the Bureau worked closely with the police and without notoriety.

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 13 – THE OPPOSITION OPPOSES

## CHAPTER 13

### *The Opposition Opposes*

THE formation of New Zealand's War Cabinet in July 1940, said the Prime Minister to Parliament, 'will find an echo in the hearts of the people, as it should give to all sections of the community confidence in the unity of Parliament and the country's political leaders....' <sup>1</sup> It would 'enable us to play our full part in the conflict by an effort of both parties in the House, and to avoid the embarrassment of political dissension and criticism.' These high hopes were, perhaps inevitably, frustrated. In November the National Party took action expressly to demonstrate that New Zealand's political leaders differed, and to ensure that criticism should be sharp; and in the second half of 1940 party politics somewhat revived, as a result of internal readjustments in the Opposition rather than of direct conflict between the two main parties. Indeed there were notable occasions when clashes were sharper in the country than when leaders met face to face in Parliament. <sup>2</sup>

In principle, all members of the National Party agreed that the war effort was of paramount importance, and that the Government's domestic policy was in some ways misguided; but this agreement did not give a basis for consistent political action. For some, the war was so supremely important that minor differences should be submerged, especially since the Government's war effort was on the right lines and on the whole well run. There were, however, those who bitterly rejected this point of view. Some urged that the war effort itself was quite inadequate. Others stressed that in their view domestic and war policy could not be disentangled, and the Government's policies in general were so unsatisfactory that the Opposition's only possible course was the traditional one: to eject the existing government with all expedition and install in its place a cabinet both wiser and more competent. This last viewpoint amounted to the outright revival of party politics. The only possible alternative was to persuade the Labour Government, which had

won an overwhelming victory in 1938 on a platform which referred predominantly to

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 512.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 258, p. 298.

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domestic affairs, to set up a two-party government and modify its internal policy accordingly.

These conflicting currents of opinion were clearly expressed in public. In his view, said J. G. Coates, in a debate at the height of the crisis, on 30 May 1940, <sup>1</sup> 'All members of Parliament can be relied upon to think in one direction only at the present time, and that is, how best to achieve the common object we have in view. No member is likely to put any question that will embarrass the government or impede that ultimate object of ours.' 'But,' said F. W. Doidge during the same debate, <sup>2</sup> 'it is our job to criticize. We are His Majesty's Opposition, our job is to criticize. Further, we know that the greatest spur in the world is criticism, and we would not be doing our job if we did not criticize, feeling, as we do, that the Government is not making the maximum effort to assist the Motherland.' In the view of many, the Opposition's capacity to criticise was gravely impeded by its leader's association with Government ministers in the War Cabinet. Nor were malcontents appeased when they observed Hamilton and Coates 'criticizing with all their former enthusiasm their colleagues in the War Cabinet on general political subjects'; <sup>3</sup> for the deduction was then drawn that the War Cabinet could itself scarcely be a satisfactory institution, certainly not one whose existence jeopardised the Opposition's traditional right to criticise, on principle, all things that a government did.

Further, some at least of the Opposition publicly rejected the view of their leaders, now installed in the War Cabinet, that New Zealand was making a satisfactory contribution to the Commonwealth war effort. <sup>4</sup>

**‘New Zealand,’ said F. W. Doidge on 19 June 1940, ‘has put forth only a fraction of the maximum effort of which she is capable.’ He quoted Churchill's statement that, if **France** fell, **Britain**, the Dominions, and the Navy would carry on still. ‘It was the lion roaring out defiance and calling out to his cubs.’ New Zealand, he said, had missed ‘a glorious opportunity. There was a chance of telling Great Britain that we in this Dominion can find two hundred thousand men <sup>5</sup>.’**

**On the other hand, in the same debate J. G. Coates rejected the view that fighting a war meant simply helping **Britain**, along the lines of British suggestions. In fact he disagreed in some respects with British estimates of the strategic situation. ‘We had to stand on our own feet as far as was practicable,’ he said, and take more precautions to defend ourselves than seemed necessary to those whose**

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Round Table*, December 1940, p. 179.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Hamilton, *Evening Post*, 21 Sep 1940.

<sup>5</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, p. 230.

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**calculations began in **London**. ‘The defence of the Empire includes the defence of New Zealand, and there are people overseas who are not so concerned about our defence as we are ourselves.’ He added that his remarks were not meant as criticism of the **New Zealand Government**. ‘It does not meet the position to say that the Government has done splendidly. Do not let us think of what has been done and what has happened; the vital thing is to know what we can do now and how quickly we can do it <sup>1</sup>.’**

**Coates spoke with responsibility: a former prime minister, who was about to join the War Cabinet and help to implement a policy to which he had given general approval. His viewpoint was endorsed by his leader, Hamilton. Those who rejected it formed a powerful group within the party. In spite of—even because of—the crisis, they argued that the war effort should be radically recast, in ways as yet undefined, and that the Opposition should resume its essential function of opposing. For them, existing leadership was clearly seen as an obstacle, together with the leaders' membership of War Cabinet. In October and November this point was clearly illustrated, for a somewhat controversial election campaign had to be fought without much campaigning by Hamilton, who was occupied by his War Cabinet duties. S. G. Holland, being free of such public responsibilities, participated freely. <sup>2</sup>**

**As late as 4 September 1940 the Dominion Council of the National Party unanimously pledged loyalty to Hamilton; <sup>3</sup> yet the stage was being set for his replacement. Holland was a successful Christchurch businessman, who had just bought a farm and could therefore claim status with both main sections of the party. He was relatively inexperienced in national politics, but had the immense advantage that he had not been in parliament during the depression and was therefore untainted by the unpopularity still clinging, however unfairly, to Hamilton and more particularly to Coates. His record in Parliament was one of consistent activity, with a taste for the polemical use of figures, and for the determined pursuit of political opportunities. In the cut and thrust of party warfare, he had shown shrewdness and dexterity, and if he had not been prominent in the formulation of higher policy, there had been no strong call on him to be so; and it was indeed a certain advantage that he was not too deeply committed on major current issues. He was, in fact, well suited to give edge to Opposition criticism. He was apparently acceptable to businessmen and the non-parliamentary wing of the party, and his promotion would avoid some of the difficulties that might have arisen with some of the older parliamentarians. On**



<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 257, pp. 243–4.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, March 1941, p. 386; *Christchurch Press*, 7 Nov 1940 and 24 Dec 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Post*, 5 Sep 1940.

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1 November, accordingly, the Divisional Executive of the party decided that he should replace Hamilton. The parliamentary party, however, had the undoubted right to choose its own leader, and the change was not completed till caucus met at the end of November. On the 26th **Holland** won the leadership by a decisive majority. ‘I lay down the burden of my task at the request of my colleagues without any regrets at the steepness of the grade the party has faced and climbed successfully,’ said Adam Hamilton. ‘The relief from my position as leader of the Opposition will enable me to give my absolutely undivided attention to the work of the War Cabinet, which every day becomes more urgent and important <sup>1</sup>.’

Rumour and occasional press reports kept the public reasonably well informed of developments, so that a change in the leadership of the Opposition was not unexpected. The election of **Holland** was, however, accompanied by the decision that he should not enter the War Cabinet. The request by the National Party that Hamilton and Coates should remain members of War Cabinet was, in one aspect, a well earned vote of confidence in distinguished men; but more than anything else it emphasised the intention of the party's change in leadership, and it placed the Prime Minister in an exceedingly awkward position. No stipulation had been made in July that the Opposition should be represented in War Cabinet by its leader, partly, perhaps, because at that time there could be no doubt as to the two members of the Opposition most suitable for appointment to War Cabinet. It had, however, always been understood that the Leader of the Opposition should be there. It was not a matter of individuals, said Fraser, and he paid high tribute to

the work of Hamilton and Coates. It was ‘a question of the coming together of parties for a common end’, the furnishing of public and impressive ‘evidence of that national unity in the war effort which we all desire <sup>2</sup>.’

Fraser expressed such views in Parliament and in national broadcasts, suggesting that if the Opposition persisted in its attitude the whole question of the War Cabinet might have to be reconsidered. **Holland** replied that he and his party were ‘absolutely determined to make New Zealand's and the Empire's war effort our first and main consideration’; and that the Opposition had increased its contribution to that effort by enabling Coates and Hamilton to give their full time to war-work. The Government, he said, had no more right to choose the Opposition's representatives in War Cabinet than the Opposition was entitled to choose members of cabinet. The only solution, said **Holland**, was that both

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<sup>1</sup> *Press*, 27 Nov 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 258, p. 281; *Evening Post*, 30 Dec 1940.

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parties should sink their differences and form a national government with full responsibility for all the country's affairs; but, he added, ‘the Opposition is not going to remain silent while the Government goes full speed ahead with its socialisation programme <sup>1</sup>.’

**Holland** did not closely define the word ‘socialisation’, nor for that matter did anyone else in public life, but his statement put two-party co-operation beyond the range of practical politics, and left his hands free for the election that was due towards the end of 1941. It indicated a revival of the main line of criticism brought by the Opposition against the Government before the war: and in fact in the first month of 1941 the new leader of the Opposition resumed the peacetime practice of a pre-sessional political tour of the country. His criticisms of the

Government were far sharper than those used by his predecessor in wartime; the Opposition had indeed refreshed the acerbity of its attack, following lines which remained basically familiar. 'New Zealand today is fighting two wars,' said **Holland**, '—one as part of the British Empire against an enemy seeking to destroy the rights and independence of the people of the Dominion; and another on the home front against a Government that is taking advantage of the war overseas to implement its full programme for the socialisation of New Zealand's industries.' There were indeed signs of willingness to base criticism on the handling of the war. In December, for instance, the Prime Minister complained that members of parliament who had criticisms to make were given an opportunity to do so in secret session, and those who then kept silence were in some part responsible for what was done and should not make public capital of defects in the war effort; and **Holland** complained on occasions that some matters concerning the war effort had not been referred to War Cabinet. <sup>2</sup> In the main, however, the Opposition's official campaign was based on internal affairs. As to the future, **Holland** suggested that those elected at the next general election should hold office for the duration of the war, and that the two parties should agree that, whoever won, a non-party national government should be formed. <sup>3</sup> Meantime, party warfare seemed to have been re-established in New Zealand, with recrimination as to who it was who had brought about this somewhat unedifying if superficial conflict.

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The political position was in fact stronger than appeared. In all the public controversy there was essential agreement in the community, and two leading men from the Opposition (with promise of

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 258, pp. 281–2; *Press*, 31 Dec 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 258, p. 591; *Manawatu Times*, 6 Feb 1941.

party support) laboured valiantly in War Cabinet. That was well, for grave decisions had to be made to meet calamities abroad. Indeed, while the new leader of the Opposition campaigned through the country, making unmistakably plain his interpretation of the duties of his office, War Cabinet was wrestling with the elusive political and military problem of **Greece** (see

**Chapter 14**). The significant fact was, however, that in the upshot the campaigns in **Greece** and **Crete** did not become a matter of party controversy in New Zealand. Indeed the vital decision was made unanimously by War Cabinet, approved by every member of the ordinary cabinet, and by the leader of the Opposition. <sup>1</sup> It evidently was closely in line with the community's sentiment, and in so far as the campaigns influenced thinking about war policy, it was on lines independent of party; for there were influential men on both sides of the House who considered that more effort should be put into local defence and the **Pacific** area, and less into far-flung battlefields where factors were hard to assess, and where someone else had primary responsibilities. <sup>2</sup> Yet, if the controversial decisions and military disasters concerning **Greece** and **Crete** did not feed party politics, neither did they, nor Allied defeats and anxieties in North Africa, nor yet the tense hopes and fears roused by **Russia's** entry into the war, do anything to promote outward political unity in New Zealand. Between the Government and the Opposition as led by **Holland** deadlock remained complete and at times acrimonious.

On 17 April, while the New Zealand Division was retreating through **Greece**, the Opposition renewed its appeal for 'a truly national non-party government'. The Prime Minister was about to visit **Europe**; such a revolutionary internal change, involving no doubt an Opposition claim to veto 'contentious' legislation, could scarcely be contemplated in the few days that remained. Fraser accordingly promised <sup>3</sup> to consider the matter on his return, giving his followers a strong exhortation to take the matter up in his absence, if circumstances seemed to demand it. Meantime, he again appealed to the Leader of the Opposition to join the War Cabinet, even if only temporarily, and he urged again the desirability of minimising political controversy in the Dominion during his absence, suggesting 'that both the Government party and the Opposition party should agree at least to suspend their active public platform propaganda <sup>4</sup>.' **Holland's** reply was clear. In his view nothing short of a non-party national cabinet with full responsibility would meet the position. He declined to join the War Cabinet; to do so

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<sup>1</sup> **Auckland Star**, 24 Apr 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *NZPD*, Vol. 259, pp. 292–5.

<sup>3</sup> *Standard*, 24 Apr 1941.

<sup>4</sup> *Dominion*, 18 Apr 1941.

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**‘would not meet the fundamental issue, as party politics would still divide the country.’ He agreed ‘that active public platform propaganda should be reduced to a minimum....It is understood, however, that the Government does not desire that its activities and other important public questions should be immune from fair and reasonable comment or discussion or that normal election preparations should be suspended <sup>1</sup>.’**

**A truce thus based was not likely to last. That which to one party politician was ‘fair and reasonable comment’, or an essential elucidation of Government policy in reply to criticism, was to another ‘obvious propaganda’, and ‘unprovoked, unnecessary and very offensive’. When Parliament met there was a marked difference in attitude among members of the Opposition. The ‘old gang’ continued to follow something rather like a non-party course. The ‘new gang’ followed **Holland** in an incessant attack on the Government, seizing upon every opportunity for criticism. <sup>2</sup>**

**As Fraser cabled from **London**, his personal view, which was strengthened by his experiences abroad, was that ‘the formation of a National Government on a basis of party representation in the proportion of numbers of members of Government and Opposition respectively without any conditions but majority decision would be advisable from both the country's and the Labour Party's point of view. I think greater national unity in war effort and during the war period among people as a whole would be attained and the responsibilities for difficult and sometimes unpopular tasks would be shared and Labour**

would emerge from the war period stronger and in a better position to fight future contests.' Further, he reported that **Japan's** entry into the war seemed 'likely and imminent', and 'I have been of the opinion for some time that if **Japan** came into the war and our country's position became more dangerous, a National Government would likely become inevitable.' However, he emphasised the extreme importance of continued unity in the Labour Party and wrote that, in spite of his personal opinions, he would 'abide by the decision of the Party expressed by Caucus, by National Executive and, if necessary, by a special Party Conference <sup>3</sup>.' The decision of the party was, in fact, clear. Caucus's view was that with present feeling in the country, a national government was impossible, and the members of the National Executive were unanimously against it. In general terms, reported Nash, 'the opinion of the Movement is at present strongly opposed to any suggestion

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<sup>1</sup> *Star-Sun*, 19 Apr 1941.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Sep 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Fraser to Nash, 29 Jul 1941.

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of a National Government and, unless something untoward happens, is certain to remain so <sup>1</sup>.' Nash, as acting Prime Minister, publicly repeated the invitation to **Holland** to join the War Cabinet and stop party bickering. He remarked, however, that in his view the formation of a non-party national government had been made impossible by the Opposition's recent tactics. <sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister returned to New Zealand on 13 September and took up the whole problem again. Action was urgent. There was a considerable body of opinion against holding the general election, which was imminent, while the overseas situation remained so tense; there were admitted objections to postponing an election in circumstances

which would maintain a party government in power; and yet it was clear that the Labour Party was adamantly opposed to a coalition with the kind of Opposition represented by S. G. Holland.<sup>3</sup> Fraser decided to make the best he could of existing machinery. He felt that so grave a step as prolonging the life of Parliament should only be taken with the concurrence of the Opposition, and accordingly, after verbal discussions, he formally asked **Holland** on 7 October what would be the attitude of the Opposition if it were proposed to postpone the election for a year, as a wartime measure.<sup>4</sup> At the same time he again invited him to join the War Cabinet, or to suggest some alternative method for promoting unity and improving co-operation. **Holland** replied that the Opposition, as a minority party, would have to accept the postponement of the election if the Government decided upon it. He again refused to join the War Cabinet, and added: 'I presume a postponement of the elections would mean that no contentious legislation would be introduced, or, virtually, that legislation and regulations would only be passed with the concurrence of the Opposition.' This last demand was rejected by the Prime Minister: it would amount, he said, to government by the Opposition. He undertook, however, to use his influence to 'reduce legislation on purely party lines to a minimum for the period' during which Parliament's life was extended; and he asked for a plain answer as to whether the Opposition would support or oppose a measure postponing the general election. On 13 October he was given the assurance he required. Armed with it, he obtained the approval of his own parliamentary party on the 15th and wrote at once to **Holland**, sending him a copy of the Bill. It was accordingly introduced that same night and passed without opposition, though

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to Fraser, 5 Aug 1941.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 259, p. 710.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; and *Evening Post*, 23 Sep 1941.



with a suggestion from **Holland** that the Government's decision had been sprung on him. <sup>1</sup>

The problem of the general election was solved, but not that of party conflict. During the next three months there followed, in fact, a series of by-elections, which the Opposition fought on party lines, mainly on domestic issues, though there was a Labour candidate only for the vacancy caused by the death on active service of a Labour MP. The Prime Minister criticised these proceedings with the greatest vigour, particularly after the Expeditionary Force went into action again in **Libya** on 20 November; but the campaign continued without remission in the weeks that followed **Pearl Harbour**. The Prime Minister said with some sharpness that the arguments against by-elections were very similar to those against general elections, which both he and the Leader of the Opposition wholeheartedly endorsed; and that he had assumed accordingly that the agreement between the two parties for the postponement of the general election covered also the avoidance of by-election campaigns. <sup>2</sup> It had not, however, been so specified. The Opposition exercised its rights, though not without dissent in the ranks of the Government's persistent critics, <sup>3</sup> and as 1942 began, full of menace from overseas, spokesmen of both parties accused each other vehemently of jeopardising national unity in the interests of party programmes. <sup>4</sup>

In short, the mounting tensions of 1941, even when crowned by the long-feared emergence of **Japan** as an active enemy, left party politics in New Zealand ostensibly very much alive. Yet the basic importance of vociferous public acrimony may be somewhat discounted. The real running of the war was in the hands of a two-party War Cabinet, which worked without publicity or consideration for party interests. The most frank and thorough parliamentary discussion of war policy took place in the fairly frequent secret sessions. Their secrecy was well preserved, at

the time and later; but there is reason to think that with publicity absent, party rancour was, to say the least, notably softened. Further, though **Holland** insisted throughout on keeping his freedom of action by refusing to join the War Cabinet, he was consulted upon occasions and given highly confidential information. This happened, with beneficial results to domestic harmony, when the decision was made to send New Zealanders to **Greece**. It happened again when Fraser explained to him in October 1941 his reasons for thinking that the elections should be postponed. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 260, p. 1144. Mr Holland: 'until I received the honourable gentleman's letter I was unaware of the Government's decision to introduce this Bill...I thought an election was on—that was my guess.'

<sup>2</sup> Fraser to **Holland**, 4 Dec 1941; *Evening Post*, 5 Dec 1941.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Post* (editorial), 5 Dec 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Round Table*, March 1942, p. 333.

<sup>5</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 260, p. 1155.

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It may be presumed that the Leader of the Opposition was out of touch with the disturbing confidential information which reached New Zealand while he was absorbed in the by-election campaigns that followed; but with them safely over, the impact of Japanese successes led New Zealand politicians once again to experiment with unity, and to show briefly that on fundamental things their agreement was close.

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 14 – POLITICIANS AND SOLDIERS

## CHAPTER 14

### *Politicians and Soldiers*

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**THE fall of France destroyed the easily sketched, conventional plan for co-operation-by-expeditionary-force: training in Egypt followed by service on the Western Front. Overnight Egypt became a potential battlefield, and the Western Front was the coastline of Britain. When the blow fell the First Echelon (with specialist sections) was in Egypt, still awaiting full equipment and final training. The Second Echelon left New Zealand at the beginning of May and was diverted to Britain, since it was not considered safe for the time being to use the Red Sea. The Third Echelon, which would complete the Division, and without which divisional training was impossible, was in camp in New Zealand. Transport and the availability of equipment to turn promising troops into first-rate fighting formations depended not only on the decisions of the New Zealand Government, but on British policy and the physical availability of ships and materials.**

**The situation was charged with problems, not only military but political. It was fundamental to the thinking of the New Zealand cabinet and of General Freyberg that New Zealand forces should operate as a self-contained formation and therefore should not fight until the complete Division was assembled and trained. It would then be used, by agreement between the two governments, under the orders of the appropriate field commander, but always as a coherent national army. This situation was roughly parallel with that of the three other dominions. The Canadians had reached a sensible formula for their troops in Britain. They would co-operate, under British command, in the defence of the United Kingdom or in limited raids on the Continent. Any other operations needed prior approval by the Canadian government, and in fact were dependent on direct negotiations between Churchill and Mackenzie King.<sup>1</sup> South African troops were under British command, an arrangement that might not have been possible without the close**

association between Smuts and Churchill. The Australian government followed a different path. It was from the first alert to the

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<sup>1</sup> Dawson, *Canada 1939–41*, pp. 230, 297; Stacey, *Six Years of War*, Vol. I., p. 410.

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problems of national status, and adopted the same course as New Zealand, a course for which there was ample precedent, that of a written 'charter' defining the position of a commander whose troops were part of an ally's army. Thus the Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French troops sent to aid the colonists in the American war of independence, had been given very explicit instructions concerning the maintenance of the French force as a unity. <sup>1</sup> Plumer in *Italy* in 1917 and Haig in *France* in 1918 held carefully defined powers, so also Gort in 1940 and Wilson in 1941. Blamey for *Australia*, then, had a charter, and stood vigorously for the independent status of his army; an attitude reinforced by the strength of Australian nationalism, by fear of *Japan*, and by the pressure on Menzies of an Opposition with a recent isolationist past and with strong objections to the use of dominion troops in the *Middle East*. <sup>2</sup> The effect was that although, when strategic decisions had been made, Australian troops fought under a British commander-in-chief, their use depended in principle on agreements between the two governments.

For New Zealand *Freyberg*, too, had a charter defining his powers. The circumstances of its negotiation have already been noted. <sup>3</sup> It made reasonably clear the position of both parties. From the first, however, it was recognised that no set formula could provide against all contingencies. In emergencies, therefore, *General Freyberg* was given wide discretion to vary normal practice, consulting his government if possible, and in any case reporting promptly what he had done. Neither he nor his government could contemplate the possibility that New Zealand soldiers would idly await the fulfilment of pre-arranged formal conditions at a time when *Hitler* might strike at the British coast at any

moment, when Wavell was desperately improvising the defence of Egypt with inadequate resources, and when **Britain's** only formidable ally was transformed overnight into a doubtful neutral. On 4 June 1940 **Freyberg** in **Cairo** suggested that the Government should consider whether the present policy of keeping the New Zealand troops out of action until the Division was concentrated should be temporarily abandoned. 'I advise,' he cabled, 'that the First and Second Echelons be concentrated in England at the first opportunity with early

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<sup>1</sup> 'It is His Majesty's desire and He hereby commands that, so far as circumstances will permit, the Count de Rochambeau shall maintain the integrity of the French troops which His Majesty has placed under his command, and that at the proper time he shall express to General Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the Congress, under whose orders the French troops are to serve, that it is the intention of the King that these shall not be dispersed in any manner, and that they shall serve at all times as a unit and under the French generals, except in the case of a temporary detachment which shall rejoin the main body without delay.'—Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, p. 386.

<sup>2</sup> Hasluck, *Government and People*, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> See

despatch to **France** if another brigade can be made available by the War Office or the Australians in the **United Kingdom** <sup>1</sup>.’

In the event, things worked out differently. **Freyberg** himself went to England. He had regretted the diversion of the Second Echelon to that country, and never himself believed that the Germans would risk a direct attack. He acknowledged, however, that the arrival of dominion troops was most opportune for the morale of a hard-pressed and courageous people; and, after some sharp negotiations with the War Office, had the New Zealanders kept together and assigned to active duty in the path of the anticipated invasion. <sup>2</sup> ‘It is one of the refreshing facts about the Anglo-Saxon race,’ he reflected, ‘they respond to being told the truth, and black as it looked the **New Zealand Government** as usual took the big line, and we were released to be used as and when required. So I went hat in hand to the CIGS and said, “Give us what equipment you can spare and give us an active operational role.” <sup>3</sup> Before long the Second Echelon was the best equipped and trained element of the New Zealand troops. It gave service that was later lyrically praised; but this happy upshot, and the reasonably prompt transfer of the echelon to Egypt, was achieved only by firm, though tactful and cooperative, resistance to plans initially favoured by the British Army.

The main problem turned out to be in Egypt, where, indeed, **Freyberg** judged the greatest military danger to lie. Before he left **Cairo**, he was approached by British Headquarters for permission to borrow certain detachments for special purposes. The case was strong and the need urgent, so **Freyberg** gave his consent, under his special powers as Commanding Officer. This policy was approved by the **New Zealand Government**, and was continued by his deputy during his absence in England. At one stage, indeed, he was told that the whole of the First Echelon was to be dispersed into six segments, only the New Zealand Headquarters remaining in **Cairo**. This instruction was objectionable on



both military and political grounds. 'We naturally refused to obey this improper order,' said **Freyberg** later,<sup>4</sup> and he cabled from England to his military superiors in **Cairo** the elementary facts about Commonwealth co-operation. The changes desired, he explained, could be made only with the approval of the **New Zealand Government**; but they were so wide of New Zealand's known wishes and would cause such deplorable reactions in the Dominion that he was unwilling even to disclose the British Command's proposal to break up the Expeditionary Force. 'The answer to any such proposals would, I am sure, be an uncompromising

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I. p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83 ff, especially p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> GOC's papers, *Historical Review*.

<sup>4</sup> *House of Lords Debates*, Vol. 181 (15 Apr 1953).

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refusal.' The major proposal was accordingly dropped. Nevertheless, when **Freyberg** returned to Egypt in September, he found that 'by peaceful means' numerous groups of New Zealanders had been detached from the main body of the force and dispersed over a wide area. Without these detachments, some of which had been for months under British control, it would be impossible for the Expeditionary Force to train as a complete division. As **Freyberg** somewhat ruefully pointed out, he was in difficulties because New Zealand had agreed to every request for the loan of troops, whereas the Australians had bluntly refused from the first. As it was, the Third Echelon was about to arrive, and the Second would come from England as soon as transport could be provided, so **Freyberg** had to set about recovering the borrowed troops. It was a difficult situation, where short-term military needs—or at least military convenience—had to be overruled by a political argument: that New Zealand forces must be enabled to fight as a national unit. **Freyberg**

acted firmly, with consistent support from **Wellington**. His position was in some respects eased, but often complicated, by the fact that the officers with whom he was negotiating were often personal friends and former colleagues of the British Army. Many letters were exchanged, said **Freyberg**, and 'things were said and done that cannot be too quickly forgotten'; indeed there is little information about them in official record. In essence, the battle for dominion status was being fought again among members of a profession bred to obedience and respect for tradition, rather than sensitive to the importance, even in long-term military significance, of sound personal and political relationships. As **Freyberg** later emphasised, there was a problem here which had been inadequately studied, even after the lessons of the First World War. <sup>1</sup>

In the end, though at personal sacrifice, the problem was solved without damage to the public service. **Freyberg** regarded himself as being in the end 'answerable to no one except his own government'; yet he was wise and loyal, with an overwhelming sense of the common interest shared with his colleagues of the British Army. <sup>2</sup> Nor can Wavell's honesty of purpose and single-mindedness be questioned. Yet in purely military terms the relations between the Commander-in-Chief and some of his principal subordinates must have remained unusual, and the dual relationship of **Freyberg** to his superiors was a problem which for two and a half years required firm and tactful handling. It was solved largely because, on the political side, **Freyberg** and the New Zealand cabinet remained in close touch and close agreement, more particularly after the

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<sup>1</sup> *House of Lords Debates*, Vol. 181 (15 Apr 1953).

<sup>2</sup> GOC's papers, *Historical Review*; also in *Army Quarterly*, October 1944, p. 33.

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critical discussions following the disasters of **Greece** and **Crete**. The New Zealand attitude retained its basic character. Desperately anxious

to ensure that convoys were adequately protected and troops properly equipped for the tasks in hand, the **New Zealand Government** would at need vigorously resist British service opinion on such matters, as indeed on overall strategy. The right to form independent judgment was stoutly defended; yet in crises the decision was for whole-hearted co-operation. Maybe the lively if spasmodic personal contacts still maintained between Churchill and both Fraser and **Freyberg** had its part in maintaining harmony. <sup>1</sup> So had the firmness and good sense of the high-ranking soldiers. Good relations between Alexander and **Freyberg** were rooted in mutual respect and practical agreement on policy, but also in the successful handling of long-drawn-out discussions where military, political and personal factors were incessantly entangled.

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In 1940 the most urgent military problem from New Zealand's viewpoint was the reassembly of its Expeditionary Force on terms enabling it to fight effectively and as a unit. When this was at last accomplished the stage had been set for a supremely hazardous military operation, which also raised political questions of the greatest difficulty.

At the end of October 1940 the Italians attacked **Greece**. They fared very ill and it at once became evident that **Germany** might well intervene. This, as **General Freyberg** promptly pointed out, made **Greece** a possible theatre of war. <sup>2</sup> **Greece** was one of those countries which **Britain** had guaranteed against aggression in 1939, and Churchill promised all the help in **Britain's** power. This in practice was little enough. British resources in the eastern **Mediterranean** were very low, and the Greeks could offer few facilities for modern aircraft. Moreover, at this stage the British Chiefs of Staff thought that if the Germans moved through **Bulgaria** and helped the Italians to overrun **Greece**, the result for **Britain's** naval position would be serious but not disastrous; and **Crete** could probably be held. In the general situation, **Turkey** seemed to them more vital than **Greece**. <sup>3</sup> In the event, within a few days of the attack on **Greece**, preparations were made to bomb northern

**Italy**; British troops went to **Crete** and defence works were started there; and on the mainland, the Air Force gave some support to the Greeks.

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, pp. 142–3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, Vol. I, p. 239.

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The Italians were, in fact, repelled; but matters could not rest there. General Wavell on 17 November noted his certainty that **Germany** would act—almost on the day on which **Hitler** announced to **Count Ciano** his intention to intervene—and German intervention was an obvious threat to **Britain's** lifeline in the **Middle East**. There were many—including **Freyberg**—who felt in 1940 that the war would be won or lost in this area rather than round the coasts of Britain herself. <sup>1</sup> The British Government could not know at this stage that **Hitler** thought of occupying **Greece** not as a springboard for action against Egypt or the **Middle East**, but as a necessary protection for his oil supply and his Russian adventure. <sup>2</sup> It had to take into account the possibility that **Germany's** impending move into **Bulgaria** was the prelude to a full-scale attack on the eastern **Mediterranean**. Accordingly, the Chiefs of Staff were set to work to study means of aiding the Greeks. Their report in January 1941 was realistic; ‘if **Germany** does undertake large scale operations against **Greece**, we could do no more than impose a small delay to their occupation of the country.’ Nevertheless Churchill instructed Wavell and Longmore to visit **Athens**. They found Metaxas to be of much the same opinion as the British Chiefs of Staff. He considered ten divisions to be the minimum aid giving hope of effective resistance, and after hearing what the British had to offer, he asked them to stay away: for a moderate-sized ground force would attract a German attack and have no chance of repelling it. Wavell, it appears, was personally of the same opinion. <sup>3</sup> Though Metaxas said later that he would accept British help when the Germans entered **Bulgaria**, military

opinion seemed definite and unanswerable. As late as 17 February 1941 Wavell made his view clear. Our military objectives in the **Balkans** are defensive, he wrote. If we could put sufficient forces into **Macedonia** to defend **Salonika** 'we shall have fulfilled our object.... Unfortunately our forces available are very limited and it is doubtful whether they can arrive in time.'

While the service commanders were under no illusions about the prospects, they were inevitably subjected to the pressure of political considerations and, no doubt, of political personalities. Churchill hoped and **Hitler** feared that some means might yet be found for constructing a **Balkan** front against **Germany**. That meant common action by **Greece**, **Turkey** and **Yugoslavia**, who together could have put a formidable number of troops into the field; and the most positive move towards bringing about that

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. **Freyberg's** appreciation of 29 Jul 1940, *Documents*, I, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> F. H. Hinsley in *Cambridge Journal*, Vol. IV; Kirk, *Middle East in War*, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Playfair, Vol. I, p. 343.

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combination would be, in Churchill's view, to face the admitted risks of a very hazardous military operation. The enterprise should be seen, he told the Australians in March, 'not as an isolated military act, but as a prime mover in a large design <sup>1</sup>.' Furthermore, considerations of principle and prestige were not far below the surface, and the possible reaction among neutrals, particularly the **United States**, to the abandonment of the Greeks was a factor.



Loading beef for England on a Wellington wharf

**Loading beef for England on a Wellington wharf**

Coal miners at work



**Coal miners at work**



Issuing ration books, April 1942

**Issuing ration books, April 1942**



Publication of a ballot, Auckland, January 1942



Publication of a ballot, **Auckland**, January 1942



Women workers at a dehydration plant, Pukekohe

Women workers at a dehydration plant, **Pukekohe**

Packing parcels for overseas, June 1942

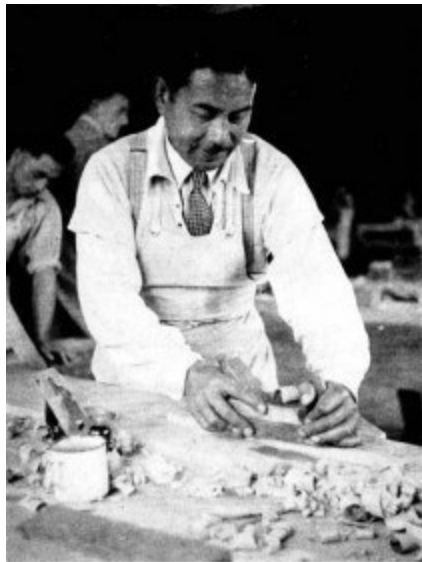


Packing parcels for overseas, June 1942



Soldiers help with the haymaking on a Waikato farm, December 1943

**Soldiers help with the haymaking on a [Waikato](#) farm, December 1943**



A Maori carpenter at the Rotorua carpentry school

**A Maori carpenter at the [Rotorua](#) carpentry school**



Polish refugee children at Pahiatua, February 1945

**Polish refugee children at [Pahiatua](#), February 1945**



Japanese prisoners of war, Featherston



**Japanese prisoners of war, Featherston**



Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser arrives at Honolulu. With him are Admiral C. W. Nimitz (left) and Vice-Admiral R. L. Ghormley

**Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser arrives at Honolulu. With him are Admiral C. W. Nimitz (left) and Vice-Admiral R. L. Ghormley**

Vice-Admiral W. F. Halsey meets a member of the NZRSA.  
On the left is the Hon. W. Perry, Minister of Armed Forces  
and War Co-ordination



**Vice-Admiral W. F. Halsey meets a member of the NZRSA.**  
**On the left is the Hon. W. Perry, Minister of Armed Forces and War Co-ordination**



Land for soldiers' farms, Rotorua

**Land for soldiers' farms, Rotorua**

The first furlough draft returns to Wellington, July 1943



The first furlough draft returns to **Wellington**, July 1943



Air Vice-Marshal L. M. Isitt signing the Japanese surrender at Tokyo Bay, September 1945. General Douglas MacArthur is at the microphone

**Air Vice-Marshal L. M. Isitt signing the Japanese surrender at Tokyo Bay, September 1945. General Douglas MacArthur is at the microphone**

In spite of Greek reluctance and the misgivings of soldiers, the plan took form. In January and February the advance in **Africa** was halted and **Cyrenaica** was only lightly held by inexperienced troops, for it was judged essential to send the greatest possible aid to **Greece**. On 11 February detailed planning for the Greek expedition was in hand, and on the 17th and 18th instructions were issued to the commanders of the troops which were to be sent. <sup>2</sup> The military machine was therefore in motion by the time that Eden and Dill arrived in **Cairo** on 19 February, to begin the round of conferences which finally launched British and dominion troops into **Greece**.

At this time the Greeks, far from invoking the guarantee of 1939, had left it much in doubt as to whether they would even consent to be helped on the only terms which **Britain** could offer. Eden and Dill, in conference with the Middle East Commanders-in-Chief, Wavell, Cunningham and Longmore, had to formulate a plan combining military with political factors and then commend it to the Greeks on the one hand and, on the other, to the Australians and New Zealanders, who would have to provide the main strength of the proposed expeditionary force. The conference's conclusion, as summarised by Eden, appeared to follow the lines forecast in **London** talks. It was a gamble, but there was some hope that part of **Greece** might be held, at least if the Yugoslavs would hold the **Monastir Gap**. Failure had to be risked but it was 'better to suffer with the Greeks than to make no attempt to help them.' Moreover, stakes were high, for this at least was certain: if nothing were done for the Greeks, there would certainly be no move from **Yugoslavia** and little hope of a move by **Turkey**.

On the 22nd Eden and Dill were in **Athens**, where the same arguments were traversed. The Greek Government's position was made very clear. Its position had been throughout that the Greeks would resist a German invasion, if necessary alone, but that the British should not send a force to **Greece** too early or in too small numbers, as this would precipitate a German invasion which there

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<sup>1</sup> PM to UKHC in **Australia**, 30 Mar 1941.

<sup>2</sup> **Freyberg** states that he was told that on no account must he tell anyone of the move to **Greece**. He asked if the **New Zealand Government** agreed and Wavell replied that they did.—**Freyberg to Kippenberger**, 10 Sep 1956.

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was otherwise a faint hope of avoiding. As this faint hope would obviously exist only in the event of peace with **Italy** and the acceptance of some degree of German control, the Greek position at this stage amounted to a postponement of an irrevocable choice between that

unpalatable course and the equally grim alternative of accepting British aid on a scale which Greek military leaders knew to be almost certainly insufficient to check an invasion. By 22 February, with the Germans massing in **Rumania** and infiltrating into **Bulgaria**, a choice between the two alternatives could no longer be postponed. It is only in the light of these considerations that Eden's success in persuading the Greeks to accept British aid is explicable, as his promise of two or even three divisions fell far short of the ten divisions which they considered the minimum for a fair risk. Although Greek military leaders appear, to say the least, to have been convinced against their will, King George of **Greece** and his Prime Minister, M. Koryzis, must have known that to reject Eden's offer would have been to admit that resistance to the Germans was utterly impracticable and to pass the initiative to those elements who would negotiate a settlement with **Germany** along the lines made by **Rumania** and **Bulgaria**. At any rate, after presenting at the beginning of the conference documents which placed on the British Government the responsibility of deciding whether or not the forces it could offer, together with the Greek Army, would be strong enough to repel the Germans and to encourage **Yugoslavia** and **Turkey** to join in the struggle, <sup>1</sup> the **Greek Government** on 23 February accepted the British offer. The decision was made in a gruelling conference which began at 10.45 p.m. on 22 February. At its conclusion, in the very small hours of the following morning, Eden 'said that he would like to be sure that the arrival of British troops in the numbers and on the conditions proposed would be sincerely welcomed by the **Greek Government**.... We did not wish to give the impression that we were forcing our offer on the Greeks; we wanted to be sure that the Greeks of their own free will were anxious to accept it.' M. Koryzis, 'without hesitation and showing some emotion, stated formally that the **Greek Government** accepted with deep gratitude the offer of HMG and entirely approved the military plan on which the British and Greek military representatives had agreed.'

The Greeks seem to have been given little ground for optimism on the prospect of rallying the Turks and Yugoslavs against **Hitler**. Both **Turkey** and **Yugoslavia** had made their position quite clear, and in the



next few days, when Eden went to Ankara, the faint hope that they might have changed their minds was dissipated in language

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<sup>1</sup> Documents presented by **Greek Government**, 22 Feb 1941.

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which was as clear as diplomatic usage allowed. <sup>1</sup> The Turks knew their danger clearly enough; but they shared the Greeks' view that the troops offered by **Britain** could make no real difference in battle, and they made it quite clear that they would remain neutral. Shortly afterwards the Yugoslav Government firmly refused to promise action if **Germany** should invade **Bulgaria**. <sup>2</sup> Meanwhile the British Government had reported to **Australia** and New Zealand the agreement reached with the Greeks on 23 February, which, of course, could only be implemented by the use of dominion troops. Permission in principle was, with whatever uneasiness, given. <sup>3</sup> As will be seen, in New Zealand's case an odd sequence in the delivery of cables resulted in cabinet being confronted at once with a request for permission to use the Division in **Greece** together with a cable from **Freyberg** saying that the Division was battleworthy and could be released for action if called upon. The detailed account of arrangements with the Greeks arrived later. <sup>4</sup>

Back in **Cairo** at the beginning of March, with the knowledge that no help could be expected from **Turkey** or from **Yugoslavia**, Eden and Dill conferred again with the **Middle East** commanders. Much apprehension was expressed, but, so the record stands, general agreement was reached that in spite of risks the operation should proceed; and they returned to **Athens**. There they found that the **Greek Government** had not acted on the military terms of the agreement of 23 February as it was understood by the British, and it was only with difficulty that they could negotiate a new and detailed military understanding on 4 March 1941. <sup>5</sup> By this time the troops destined for **Greece** were on the move, and many of them actually embarked, and it was at this stage that the New Zealand and Australian governments were asked to give their final approval to the use of their troops on the venture. They approved, with misgivings that

were candidly expressed. Very soon afterwards controversy began as to whether they had been given adequate opportunity to make a well-informed and responsible judgment, or whether they had in practice been committed by a British decision, formulated by Churchill in **London**, or perhaps by Eden in **Athens**.

On these issues, as always, voluminous information was supplied from **London**; it could not, however, cover every point, nor could cabled advice convey as between Eden and Churchill, or as between **London** and **Wellington**, the full details as grasped by men on the spot or the precise balance between political and service arguments.

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<sup>1</sup> Playfair, Vol. I, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents*, I, pp. 239 ff; Hasluck, p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents*, I, pp. 207, 239.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

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The broad situation was placed before the **New Zealand Government** on 23 January 1941. On 20 February the position was again summarised, and New Zealand was told that ‘our major effort is now directed to making all necessary preparations and assembling forces to aid **Greece** and/or **Turkey** against German attack.’ There is no evidence, however, of the Government having been told that since 17 February **Freyberg** knew his Division would be sent to **Greece**. **Freyberg** himself made no comment to his Government, but on 23 February reported that ‘should the British Government request the release of the NZEF for a full operational role, the **New Zealand Government** can now do so with confidence <sup>1</sup>.’ This cable reached the **New Zealand Government**

simultaneously with a formal request from **Britain** for permission to use the Division in **Greece**, a request made without detailed explanation of the plan. **Freyberg's** cable was naturally taken as an indication that he knew of the impending operation and that it had his general approval. <sup>2</sup> The Government immediately agreed, and a few hours later confirmed its approval clearly though anxiously on receiving the slightly belated cable setting out the British Government's case. Before the New Zealand reply was received, however, the Division had received orders for the move towards **Greece**. After Eden's visit to **Turkey**, when hopes of Turkish and Yugoslav support had to be abandoned, and when there was an alarming change in the attitude of the Greeks, almost all the relevant cables were repeated to New Zealand. These included a comment by Churchill which has been held to prove that right to the last he was hesitating. <sup>3</sup> The changed situation, he cabled to Eden on 6 March, 'makes it difficult for Cabinet to believe we now have any power to avert the fate of **Greece** unless **Turkey** and **Yugoslavia** come in, which seems to us most improbable.... We do not see any reason for expecting success, except, of course, we attach great weight to the opinions of Dill and Wavell. A rapid German advance will probably prevent any appreciable British and Imperial force from being engaged. Loss of **Greece** and **Balkans** by no means a major catastrophe for us provided that **Turkey** remains honestly neutral.' Yet Eden and his advisers on the spot unanimously

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> **General Freyberg** states emphatically that he had been given no information on which he could express a responsible and well-informed judgment, that he understood that the decision to go to **Greece** had been taken on a level which he could not touch and that he did not suppose that his assurance of the fitness of the Division for war would be taken as approval of the expedition. 'At that time I knew little or nothing about the Greek campaign. I did not have any proper maps of **Greece**. I did not know the size of the forces involved, or the relationship with **Yugoslavia**, with **Turkey** or with the Greek Army, neither



could I get any information from **Middle East** sources. When I cabled the **New Zealand Government** that we were “Fit for war as a two-brigade Division” I was using a term understood by soldiers, but it had no relation to the Greek adventure except insofar as we might be used in **Greece.**’— **Freyberg** to **Kippenberger**, 10 Sep 1956.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. F. H. Hinsley, *Cambridge Journal*, Vol. IV, p. 426.

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decided that the operation should proceed, and entered into an agreement with the Greeks to that effect. Their action was endorsed by the British cabinet, which based its decision on the views of the Commanders-in-Chief on the spot, of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and of the commanders of the forces to be employed; <sup>1</sup> that is, **Freyberg**, and Blamey of **Australia**, to whom, Wavell said, he had explained the greatly increased hazards of the operation, and who were expressly reported as being agreeable to operating it. <sup>2</sup> The British Government reached its decision, however, without waiting for a comprehensive military appreciation <sup>3</sup> from the men on the spot. They acted on the conclusion, without full technical arguments; which, it has been said, they would have been unlikely to do ‘if the recommendation had not been in line with their own inclinations <sup>4</sup>.’

On 6 March Churchill said explicitly that the whole matter had to be referred to the dominion governments whose troops were to be used, and that their consent could not be taken for granted. <sup>5</sup> Yet the movement of the New Zealand Division had, in fact, commenced, advanced parties sailing on the 6th; and on the 7th Wavell was authorised to proceed, without any formal reservation of dominion rights. At this stage it would have been an extreme step, though not inconceivable, for the New Zealand and Australian governments to veto the whole affair. Yet there is no evidence that their assent was due to unwillingness to upset a timetable which was so far advanced. Both Blamey and **Freyberg** later expressed grave criticism of the military aspects of the venture, but neither spoke before the political decision was irrevocable. It must

remain a matter for speculation whether the decision of the Australian and New Zealand governments would have been different if all the facts known to the British cabinet in **London** had been available to them. However, with the documents now available, it is clear that their information was misleading in certain respects. The hope that **Turkey** and **Yugoslavia** might act was mentioned after Eden and others had said explicitly that no such hope was reasonable. The attitude of the Commanders-in-Chief in the **Middle East** was not made clear to the Dominions, if indeed it was made clear to **London**. 'Our advisers at present in the **Middle East** have recom-

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> CIGS to UK Govt, 6 Mar 1941. **Freyberg**, as we have seen, denies emphatically that he ever received any such explanation or expressed any such agreement.— **Freyberg** to **Kippenberger**, 10 Sep 1956.

<sup>3</sup> On 7 March Churchill informed Eden that 'a precise military appreciation' was indispensable as it was necessary to justify the operation to the Dominions on other grounds than *noblesse oblige* and a 'commitment entered into by a British Cabinet Minister at **Athens** and signed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff ....'—Churchill, Vol. III, pp. 92–3.

<sup>4</sup> *Playfair*, Vol. II, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 252.

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the enterprise': <sup>1</sup> this general phrase concealed the fact that these officers thought that the chances of success were very small, but agreed that for political reasons the operation should go forward in defiance of

**military prudence. They thought there was a fighting chance, and the prospects by no means hopeless; but those reading the cables could scarcely have realised their fears. There was certainly no emphasis on the fact that the Greeks, early in February, by documents again brought to the notice of Eden on 22 February at the beginning of the Anglo-Greek discussions in Athens, so far from appealing for help, asked that British troops should stay away unless they could arrive in good time and in sufficient strength. On existing evidence, neither the British nor Greek military leaders modified their initial estimate that eight divisions, with one in reserve, was the minimum requirement for the Aliakmon line. Nor did either British or Greeks ever consider that there were any military possibilities without positive assistance from Yugoslavia or Turkey or both.**

**These facts were not made clear in the cables. Moreover, one of Eden's last cables was not repeated to New Zealand. It reported, among other things, that Longmore, for the Air Force, was not confident that he could give adequate air support to the operations. 'Longmore requires all the help that can be given. If he can hold his own, most of the dangers and difficulties of this enterprise will disappear <sup>2</sup>.'**

**All these facts accordingly were known to Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff, and to Eden and his advisers in the Middle East, unless indeed they were temporarily obliterated from day-to-day calculations by the rush of events. They were not fully conveyed to the Dominions. In particular, an attentive study of the cables could not give to the dominion cabinets (or probably, for that matter, to the British War Cabinet and Menzies in London) an adequate forecast of the devastating extent of German air superiority. What was more serious, the views of the CIGS and of the Middle East commanders were quoted, in the main, in their final form, wherein military and political arguments were blended. The preliminary discussions, in which the military risks were no doubt faithfully analysed, were not—perhaps they could not be—conveyed to London or to the Dominions. Yet despite these omissions, the difference between the documents available to the New Zealand**

**Government on 9 March 1941 and those in the hands of historians is the kind of difference that is inevitable when living material is studied, selected, and drafted into words. It inescapably reflects to some**

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Eden to Churchill, 7 Mar 1941.

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extent the viewpoint of the men concerned; and it may well be that this range of documents, passing under Churchill's powerful influence, reflected more than it should have done his conviction—or that of Eden—that the Greeks should be aided. The steady development of the idea of intervening in the **Balkans**, and the close association between Churchill and Eden, strongly indicates a political decision maintained by Eden on his mission that the Greeks must be kept in the war, and if necessary persuaded to accept the only kind of help which **Britain** was in a position to offer. The Greek attitude on 22 February was that, having made their own views clear, it was a British responsibility to decide whether or not British troops should be sent to **Greece**. That responsibility was accepted, and the formal decision taken, with constitutional propriety, by War Cabinet in **London**. Present evidence does not show conclusively what human realities underlay this conclusion.

This much is plain. The decision, however achieved, was a British decision, and was accepted by **Greece**, by **Australia** and by New Zealand. So far as New Zealand was concerned, it was accepted not only because this was a British lead endorsed, incidentally, by the Australian Prime Minister, who was then in **London** and had recently been in **Cairo**, but also because the **New Zealand Government** felt that it understood the issues and the risks and gave deliberate approval to the operation. Its cable of 9 March 1941 <sup>1</sup> showed, up to a point, a sound enough understanding of the situation, including the predominance of German air power and the extreme unlikelihood of help from **Turkey** or **Yugoslavia**. 'His Majesty's Government in New Zealand, with a full

knowledge of the hazards to be run, align themselves with His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** and agree with the course now proposed.'

In military terms, then, the **New Zealand Government** knew that the operation was extremely hazardous—they strongly urged that plans for evacuation should be immediately prepared—but they rated highly the moral and political arguments for action. 'They cannot contemplate the possibility of abandoning the Greeks to their fate, especially after the heroic resistance with which they have met the Italian invader. To do so would be to destroy the moral basis of our cause and invite results greater in their potential damage to us than any failure of the contemplated operation <sup>2</sup>.' According to the subsequent testimony of H. G. R. Mason, Attorney-General during the war, the decision was a political one, taken with knowledge of the military arguments against it, and even with realisation that the whole Division might be lost. 'At that time,' he

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, pp. 257–8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

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said, 'we dared not do anything that might have appeared to be a moral failure.... No blame should be passed on to soldiers when the responsibility belonged to politicians <sup>1</sup>.' Peter Fraser, in his efforts after the whole campaign to get at the basic facts, also stressed succinctly the same viewpoint: 'the operation was necessary (unless militarily impossible),' he wrote in June 1941, 'for non-military, political and moral reasons'; and in the same circumstances the **New Zealand Government** would do the same again.

This emphasis on moral issues was characteristic of New Zealand policy, and it was one of the factors leading the Government to accept a really grave military risk. If Fraser had known in February and March

that the Greeks were being persuaded to accept aid, not asking for it, and that the military risks were even greater than those which he had deduced from the information available, his reaction might have been different. It would almost certainly have been different if **Freyberg** on 23 February or even up to 7 March had expressed the doubts of the expedition's military feasibility which he afterwards said he already entertained. No more can positively be said.

On 27 March there occurred just such a development as must have been in Churchill's mind when he envisaged military operations in the **Balkans**. A military coup in **Yugoslavia** overthrew the regime of the regent Prince Paul which had just acceded to the Tripartite Pact. **Hitler's** reaction, however, was prompt. On 6 April both **Yugoslavia** and **Greece** were invaded by German forces.

The campaign in **Greece**, as in **Yugoslavia**, was short and disastrous, and the story, told elsewhere in this series, followed the course which the soldiers in their hearts expected. The Division was in action on 10 April; on the night of the 28th a fighting evacuation was completed.<sup>2</sup> Of 53,000 British, Australian, and New Zealand troops in **Greece**, 12,000 were lost, 19,000 were evacuated to **Crete**, and the remainder found their way to Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

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In the weeks that followed, a further politico-military problem had to be unravelled, and a further disaster endured. The decision to defend **Crete** was made by the British War Cabinet, despite the grave misgivings of Wavell, Commander-in-Chief on the spot. In any case, for the moment, the ships for evacuation were not available.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the King of the Hellenes and his government were

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 23 Apr 1953; *NZPD*, Vol. 299, pp. 213–17.

<sup>2</sup> **Freyberg's** report in *Documents*, II, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Figures from Churchill, Vol. III.

<sup>4</sup> Freyberg, memoranda of 31 Oct 1949 and 5 Dec 1949.

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installed on the island, making a further responsibility for the defenders. The security of **Crete** had been a British responsibility since November <sup>1</sup> and the understanding throughout was that it would be defended to the utmost; <sup>2</sup> yet in the six months which passed before the German attack little was done—perhaps little could be done—to equip it as a fortress capable of dealing with a crisis which could have been foreseen. From the time that Commonwealth troops moved into **Greece** the Australian and New Zealand governments had repeatedly pressed that plans should be made for evacuation, and this was done. <sup>3</sup> Yet when that evacuation had in fact to be carried out it was a desperate effort, not part of a planned regrouping of strength for the defence of **Crete**. That defence had to be virtually improvised, with quite inadequate resources, in the three weeks that remained before attack. Once again political decisions had outrun military capacity.

On 30 April General Wavell conferred with **Freyberg** at **Canea**, and asked him to take command of the British, Australian and New Zealand troops on the island. **Freyberg's** plea, made before he knew of the imminence of an attack, that, as the servant of the **New Zealand Government**, his job was to go back to Egypt and reorganise his shattered division, was overruled on grounds of duty. He accepted the commission, reflecting that after all the bulk of the Expeditionary Force was still on **Crete**, and asked for an estimate of the probable scale and timing of the German attack. To his concern, the War Office estimate of the weight of attack was vastly greater than he and Wavell had expected. He accordingly reported that in his opinion, bearing in mind his experiences of German attacks in **Greece**, **Crete** could not be held without full naval and air support. Failing this, he urged that the decision to hold **Crete** should be reconsidered. This report went to Wavell, as his commanding officer, and also, in terms of his charter, to



the **New Zealand Government**. 'I recommend,' he cabled to Fraser, 'that you bring pressure to bear on the highest plane in **London** either to supply us with sufficient means to defend the island, or to review the decision that **Crete** must be held <sup>4</sup>.'

The decision was not reversed. Maybe it was too late to do so. In any case, said Wavell, his instructions were 'most definite'; he thought it very doubtful whether there were ships available to move the troops, and he reported that opinion in **Cairo** judged that the War Office had exaggerated the probable scale of attack. Every effort would be made to equip **Freyberg's** force adequately: but air

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> *Cunningham, A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents*, I, pp. 285 ff.

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support would evidently be lacking until more aircraft arrived from **Britain**. Churchill, appealed to by Fraser, could not do much more than assure him that the holding of **Crete** was of high importance, and that all things physically possible would be done to help its garrison. **Freyberg**, in fact, had to do the best he could; and so the results of the basic decision to intervene in **Greece** moved to their inevitable disastrous conclusion.

The attack fell on **Crete** on 20 May 1941, and heroic resistance was on the verge of success. After a week's fierce fighting, however, it became clear that the island could not be held, and there followed the tragic and costly operation of saving as many as possible of the defenders. The story is one of purely military history, save for one factor, the presence in Egypt of Peter Fraser. The position had its



difficulties. The political head of a state was established on the edge of a battlefield at military headquarters which were under the control of a great, friendly ally. For practical purposes, the whole of New Zealand's military forces, and a high proportion of her trained manpower, were involved; yet the British Government, while not unmindful of this fact, had preoccupations which straddled the world. In these circumstances, the Prime Minister had a very personal and vigorous conception of his duties. His activities were incessant. He was in touch with everyone, from rank and file soldiers as they arrived from **Crete** to the Commander-in-Chief, and, by cable, with Churchill himself. On the one hand he kept warm the humble but stimulating human contacts for which, among contemporary politicians, he appeared to have an almost unique skill. On the other, he kept the highest officers under constant pressure to ensure that all things possible were done for the men who had fought on **Crete**. As one result of Fraser's activity, the much battered Navy sent yet one more ship to **Crete**, and an additional 1400 soldiers, half of them New Zealanders, were carried safely to Egypt.<sup>1</sup> More important in the general picture was the stiffening given by the whole episode to the concept of dominion status in wartime, and the clarification of the character of military co-operation.

This clarification began with an odd incident. A British Inter-Services Committee sat in **Cairo** to consider some aspects of the Greek campaign. At Fraser's request, it considered also some criticisms of **Freyberg's** conduct of the Division's retreat in **Greece**. As **Freyberg** reported later, the committee 'upheld my action and gave me an unsolicited testimonial.' He was then sent for by his Prime Minister, and told that he had failed the **New Zealand Government** in not giving warning that the Greek operation was in

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, I, p. 329; Davin, *Crete*, pp. 448–9.

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his view dangerous and not feasible.<sup>1</sup> This explosion raised forcibly the whole problem of the relations between a dominion army and its

British High Command, a problem which was also being thrashed out in **Australia**. General Wavell was under the impression that the Dominions had been consulted. He had, it seems, discussed the Greek project with the Australian Prime Minister, Menzies, in February, and Menzies was present at the British War Cabinet meeting on 24 February when the vital decision was made. In Wavell's view, too, he had explained the situation to **Freyberg** on 17 February, to Blamey, the Australian commander, on the 18th, and to both of them on 6 March. In the view of these two generals, however, as expressed subsequently, they were on these occasions receiving instructions as subordinate officers, not being consulted as the commanders of independent national armies. **Freyberg** explained forcefully to Fraser the near-impossibility of a subordinate commander in such circumstances criticising the plans of his superior. In the past, indeed, both Blamey and **Freyberg** had objected to British army plans, and had exercised the right given them by charter to communicate directly with their own governments. In this instance neither of them gave any report to their respective governments on the strategy of the campaign until well after the political decisions had been made.<sup>2</sup> Both of them later reported that they had been opposed to the basic plan from the first. It may be doubted whether, in the military consultations of 17 February and 6 March, **Freyberg** received—or asked for—enough information to enable him to form a solid judgment on the issues involved.<sup>3</sup> He presumably knew considerably less than the **New Zealand Government** thought that he knew when it read his report that the Division could be safely released for action. It was not easy and would not be easy in the future for a relatively junior commander to probe the plans of General Headquarters.

Faced with this situation, Fraser laid down plainly the conditions under which the New Zealand Expeditionary Force should continue to be used. 'No matter who your commander in chief or what his rank may be, it is your duty to keep us in touch with the situation.' In particular **Freyberg** was required, when the Division was ordered

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<sup>1</sup> House of Lords debate, 15 Apr 1953; *Documents*, I, p. 323;

**Freyberg's comments on Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, and on Fraser's cable of 7 Jun 1941.**

<sup>2</sup> *House of Lords Debates*, 15 Apr 1953, Col. 771 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. **Freyberg** in House of Lords, 18 Mar 1954. At a meeting at GHQ Middle East on 6 Mar 1941: 'Wavell said he had informed **General Freyberg** of the latest developments ... **General Freyberg**, though he realises the added difficulties, was not perturbed and was prepared to go ahead. He had made no suggestion that his Government might be unwilling to go ahead.' Blamey's criticisms were tentatively suggested to Menzies on 5 Mar 1941 and set out strongly to the Australian Government on 10 March. Apparently the dominion troops commenced to embark on 5 March (Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Ch. XIII).

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into action, to satisfy himself personally that air cover and armoured support was adequate. 'We are not going to have another **Greece and Crete**.' Instructions were, moreover, followed up during the subsequent course of the war by persistent and pertinent inquiries, with which **Freyberg** as a New Zealander no doubt sympathised, but which to him as a soldier were acutely embarrassing. For long periods, in fact, in spite of his own efforts in 1939 to have these matters clear from the first, he was the spearhead in a fight for dominion status in the Commonwealth's armies. A Commander-in-Chief, he remarked ruefully, takes some little time to understand the matter, to learn that the NZEF was not 'just another British division', and to accept the fact that its commanding officer was in duty bound to send to his Prime Minister 'a full and frank opinion of any operation contemplated where the Division is to be employed'. <sup>1</sup> Nor was it easy for **Freyberg** to deal with last-minute inquiries from **Wellington** on the eve of battle as to what he thought of his superior officers. <sup>2</sup> Yet it may be counted a gain that British commanders learnt to deal with a subordinate who spoke his own and his government's mind. Plans were from time to time modified by discussion rather than by insistence upon rights, and by and large the subsequent extensive use of the Division was along lines approved by its

commander and his government. Cabinet, for its part, continued, as from the first, to seek and follow closely **Freyberg's** advice on military matters. The good relations within the Eighth Army in the hour of victory were the result of the courage and wisdom shown in difficult circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> *House of Lords Debates*, 15 Apr 1953.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 15 – IMPACT OF THE PACIFIC

## CHAPTER 15

### *Impact of the Pacific*

**INTERACTION** between heredity and environment has been one of the constant factors in the history of New Zealand as of all colonies. In turn her two immigrant peoples—Polynesian and European—adapted an imported culture to the conditions of their new home, thus becoming in some degree New Zealanders. For white men in particular, the claims of history and geography have seemed to be in perpetual conflict, but with history on the whole predominant; though they were planted in the **Pacific**, their thinking, their strategy, their economic interests remained obstinately European. Yet the influence of history has proved equivocal, for one aspect of New Zealand's development has been precisely an involvement in **Pacific** affairs. Since very early days, missionary activities reminded at least some New Zealanders that they lived in Polynesia; and **Pacific** islanders have been a small but persistent element in New Zealand life. Though trade has been predominantly with **Britain**, it has not been exclusively so. There has been room for activity—and ambition—among neighbouring islands, and sometimes a pugnacious concern that communications in the **Pacific** area should run effectively and if possible remain in British hands. Quiet adaptations have accordingly modified the way of life of men and women who believed themselves to be unalloyed Europeans. Far-sighted individuals voiced fears and ambitions for their country's future in terms of her geographical destiny, and from time to time the **Pacific** forcibly invaded New Zealand consciousness. The stream of European influence ran strongly; but, jerkily and uneasily, with back-slidings and nostalgic regrets, New Zealanders over the years learnt to include an increasing element of **Pacific**-consciousness into their lives, and the strength of that element has been claimed as the best index to New Zealand's national maturity. During wartime years an education that had been slow and irregular operated at frightening speed, with the Japanese as insistent schoolmasters, and with the Americans, themselves learning similar lessons, hammering **Pacific** politics into a new shape, and

finding a new balance between **Europe** and **Asia**.

From the first, attitudes towards **Japan** were fundamental to New Zealand's war policy. Some degree of confidence in Japanese neutrality had been the condition of New Zealand's willingness to send a substantial force overseas, and her obvious vulnerability made the preservation of that neutrality a vital interest. Despite its indignation at **Japan's** war in **China**, her government acquiesced in **Britain's** placatory attitude towards **Japan** in the early part of the European war. Before the outbreak of war New Zealand had asserted with some asperity that an inflexible moral code was applicable in the **Far East** as elsewhere. In September 1939 the paradoxical reality seemed to be that the abandonment of appeasement in **Europe** might well mean its intensification in **Asia**. On 5 September the Government urged New Zealand newspapers to avoid 'the publication of reprint matter or comment which might in any way seem to reflect on **Japan** or **Italy**', so as to avoid prejudicing the development of 'still more friendly relations' with these countries.<sup>1</sup> This action may reflect not only British policy, but possibly an appreciation, bluntly stated in R. G. Menzies's first broadcast as Prime Minister of **Australia**,<sup>2</sup> that the two dominions bore the 'primary risk' in the **Pacific**. It was, however, balanced and soon outweighed by another consideration: the desire to encourage **United States** participation in the defence of the **Pacific**. This produced a degree of regard to the reactions of a country outside the Commonwealth which was a new development in New Zealand foreign policy. Though less advertised at the time than the independence displayed at Geneva over **Spain**, **Abyssinia** and **China**, it was really both more novel and more solidly based. The one was nourished by, if it did not arise from, a certain lack of realism—or cynicism—in New Zealand thinking about overseas affairs. The other arose from New Zealand's own assessment of a situation whose outlines were emerging for the first time and were to become much more pronounced in the next few years.

One element in this situation was uncertainty about British ability to protect New Zealand from **Japan** by holding **Singapore** and sending



naval reinforcements there. New Zealand uneasiness on this score was evident at the Defence Conference of April 1939, and at the gathering of Commonwealth premiers in **London** in November. Nor was it entirely removed by British assurances. <sup>3</sup>

If there was reason for uneasiness as to what **Britain** might be able to do in the East, there were grounds for optimism regarding the part that the **United States** might eventually come to play in that area. American 'isolationism' was, after all, a reaction primarily against European 'entanglements' and did not exclude interest in **China** and in the **Pacific** islands. It was natural, therefore, that in

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<sup>1</sup> Circular issued through national Press Association office.

<sup>2</sup> Hasluck, *Government and People*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 99.

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his first efforts to modify that isolationist trend, Roosevelt should have been thinking more of the menace of **Japan** than of **Germany**. Japanese brutality and disregard of American interests in **China** gave both impetus and a considerable measure of success to his policy. Two months before the European war broke out the administration—encouraged by Congressional feeling against **Japan**—had served notice of intention to terminate the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation with that country. This gave the **United States** the right, after six months, to single out **Japan** for an economic embargo. <sup>1</sup> Among the papers placed before the Commonwealth ministers at the conference of November 1939 was an assessment of American opinion by Lord Lothian, British Ambassador in Washington. There was not, he reported, 'any particularly strong feeling...for **Australia** and New Zealand, though they are popular as young democracies'; yet opinion was hardening against **Japan**, and reaction against Japanese aggression in the **Pacific**. 'Partly because the Central Pacific is now regarded as a kind of American reserve,' he wrote,

**‘partly because the expansion of Japan overseas would eventually threaten the Monroe Doctrine, and partly because a war with Japan would probably not involve sending abroad vast armies of conscripts, I think that long before Japanese action threatened Australia or New Zealand, America would be at war.’**

**Doubts about British strength in the Pacific, and hopes, however contingent, of American activity, naturally influenced New Zealand's reaction to British Far Eastern policy in 1940 and 1941. When in February 1940 the British Government expressed itself as willing to participate only to a limited extent, so far as Japan was concerned, in an American proposal for a progressive embargo on war materials to Germany, Russia and Japan, New Zealand commented that this might cause ‘resentment and misunderstanding’ in the United States. ‘It would be wise to pay less regard to the susceptibilities of Japan....and on the other hand to attach the greatest possible weight to good relations with the United States and to the encouragement in every possible way of every American tendency towards resisting or restraining aggression <sup>2</sup>.’ In April, it is true, New Zealand agreed with Australian objections to a British plan for intercepting supplies going to Germany through the Far East. Both dominions felt that the military advantage to be gained was not worth the risk of provoking Japan or Russia. Nevertheless, New Zealand expressed opposition to any concessions to Japan designed to gain her co-operation in the blockade as ‘such a bargain must have the effect in some degree firstly of strengthening Japan's position in her attacks**

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<sup>1</sup> Feis, *Road to Pearl Harbour*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>GGNZ, to SSDA, 9 Feb 1940.

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**on China and secondly of alienating neutral sympathy particularly in the United States <sup>1</sup>.’ The British carried the plan further but eventually abandoned it as they were unable to reach agreement with**

the Japanese. <sup>2</sup>

The existing trends in New Zealand's **Pacific** policy were strongly confirmed by the immediate results of German victories in mid-1940, and in particular by their shattering effects on Far Eastern strategy. On 13 June the British Government gave New Zealand a general survey of the probable position if **Britain** had to continue the war without **France**. In the course of it the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs remarked that 'In the unlikely event of **Japan**, in spite of the restraining influence of the **United States of America**, taking the opportunity to alter the *status quo* in the **Far East** we should be faced with a naval situation in which, without the assistance of **France**, we should not have sufficient forces to meet the combined German and Italian navies in European waters and the Japanese fleet in the **Far East**. In the circumstances envisaged it is most improbable that we could send adequate reinforcements to the **Far East**. We should therefore have to rely on the **United States of America** to safeguard our interests there.' For the Admiralty, maybe, this was the materialisation of a possibility long envisaged, and indeed bluntly expressed in very secret discussions with the Americans. <sup>3</sup> For the **New Zealand Government**, however, the despatch of 13 June was, for all the official lifelessness of its language, an announcement of almost apocalyptic character.

The situation was not one for recriminations, but the reply has claims to be considered the most important single document in the formation of New Zealand foreign policy. A departure had been made, cabled Fraser to Churchill, from the understanding, reinforced by repeated and most explicit assurances, that a strong British fleet would be available to, and would, proceed to **Singapore** should the circumstances so require even if this involved the abandonment of British interests in the **Mediterranean**. His Majesty's Government in New Zealand do not in any way demur to this decision (which they have always regarded as a possibility) if, as they assume, it is necessary in order to safeguard the position in the central and critical theatre of war and they are quite prepared to accept the risks which they recognize are

inevitable if the most effective use is to be made of Commonwealth Naval Forces. At the same time His Majesty's Government in New Zealand must observe that the undertaking to despatch an adequate fleet to **Singapore**, if required, formed the basis of the whole of this Dominion's defence preparations. They assume that this undertaking will again be made more operative as soon as circumstances may allow and they would most earnestly request that the whole situation should be reviewed if the position in the **Far East** should become threatening.

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<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 20 Apr 1940.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to GGNZ, 1 Aug 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, Vol. I, p. 630; Morison, *Rising Sun in the Pacific*, pp. 48 ff.

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The War against Japan: Allied Operations in the Pacific

### The War against **Japan**: Allied Operations in the **Pacific**

The message then asked for **British** agreement to the despatch of a **New Zealand** cabinet minister to **Washington** on a special mission 'In the hope of strengthening the security of the **Pacific** and of reinforcing the representations already made to **President Roosevelt** on behalf of the **Allies**... <sup>1</sup>.'

The British Government advised against any immediate visit by a New Zealand minister to **Washington**, as the obstacle to more active American aid arose from public, and not government, reluctance. Such a visit might even be 'misinterpreted as an effort to influence the forthcoming Presidential election and to drag the **United States** into the war <sup>2</sup>.' The New Zealand Government, in reply, emphasised the deterioration in the **Pacific** situation, and remarked blandly on the possibility that 'His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, preoccupied as they must be with affairs of the most vital moment, do not perhaps completely understand the point of view that is being forced by circumstances upon the Governments and peoples of New Zealand and, it is believed, **Australia**.' It explained firmly its desire quickly to follow **Australia** in establishing the closest possible relations with the **United States**, always with regard to the Dominions' 'primary connection with the British Commonwealth.' It wished, on the one hand, to satisfy public opinion in the Dominion, and on the other to assist 'discreetly in establishing as far as possible the principle that the **United States** cannot be disinterested in the isolated British communities in this area and to lead as delicately as possible to the active co-operation of the **United States** in assisting to preserve the political integrity and economic well-being of those communities <sup>3</sup>.' As to methods, it tactfully asked British advice, suggesting however that the solution might lie in the establishment of a permanent diplomatic post in Washington. This was acceptable to **Britain** and to the **United States**, and the formal approval of the American Government on 23 December completed the necessary diplomatic preliminaries.

There followed eleven months' delay before the first New Zealand minister to **Washington** was appointed. It was apparently accepted that the minister should be a member of cabinet, and the Prime Minister, in whose hands the selection lay, <sup>4</sup> long hesitated; for he had to choose between sending someone who could not really be spared from **Wellington** and someone who might not be adequate in **Washington** if a crisis developed in the **Pacific**. In February 1941 it was announced that the New Zealand and **United States** governments had agreed to exchange

<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 15 Jun 1940.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to GGNZ, 7 Jul 1940.

<sup>3</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 9 Jul 1940.

<sup>4</sup> Langstone, *Dominion*, 8 Dec 1942.

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arrangement with a flavour of compromise was adopted. Gordon Coates was sent to **America** to discuss the supply of munitions, and Frank Langstone, Minister of Lands, who had been a critic within cabinet of the majority's financial policy and of the formation of the War Cabinet, went to discuss trade. He was also charged to make preliminary arrangements for the New Zealand Legation in Washington. This twofold mission was regarded in New Zealand as a 'vigorous attempt to build up still more close and fruitful relations between this country and **North America**'; <sup>1</sup> but it left the diplomatic gap unbridged during the crisis that preceded **Pearl Harbour**. Coates returned to New Zealand and publicly emphasised the importance of a speedy decision on the matter, but Langstone remained in **Washington** with his status undefined. As war with **Japan** drew nearer Fraser came to the conclusion that the importance of the **Washington** post would be such that it could only be filled by a member of War Cabinet, and on 18 November Walter Nash was appointed Minister to the **United States**. Langstone, it appeared, would have been appointed to **Washington** if Nash had found it necessary to move to **London** to attend the Far Eastern Council; in April 1942 he became first High Commissioner to **Canada**. He shortly afterwards resigned, however, and broke from his colleagues in the cabinet, maintaining that he had been misled as to the **Washington** appointment.

Delays in finally establishing diplomatic relations with the **United States** do not detract from the importance of Fraser's cable of 15 June



1940 as an expression of New Zealand's war policy. New Zealand accepted the necessity of concentrating the Commonwealth's forces against the present enemy in **Europe**; she did not entertain any great expectations of what **Britain** could do to help her if war came to the **Pacific**, and if it did come she saw her main hope in the **United States**. It seems a fair assumption that this remained the case after Churchill on 11 August 1940 restored the British guarantee in terms which, though generous, suggested that it might only become effective after the worst had happened to the southern dominions. 'If,' he wrote, '...contrary to prudence and self-interest, **Japan** set about invading **Australia** or New Zealand on a large scale, I have the explicit authority of Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the **Mediterranean** and proceed to your aid, sacrificing every interest except only the defence of the safety of this Island on which all depends <sup>2</sup>.' Accordingly, New Zealand continued to feel her way towards a Far Eastern policy in the **Pacific**, in a manner showing unwonted independence of overseas leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, September 1941, p. 822.

<sup>2</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 11 Aug 1940; COS Paper, 3 Sep 1940.

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This had shown itself, even in 1940, in a continual opposition to the 'appeasement' of **Japan**. In the circumstances of June 1940 the British Government had begun to consider very seriously whether something of the kind might be unavoidable. On 26 June it reported to the Dominions the opinion of the British Ambassador in **Tokyo**, Sir Robert Craigie, that 'our object should on no account be to involve the **United States** in the war in the **Far East** on our behalf. Such involvement would be disastrous to our most vital interests since it would divert **United States** attention from **Europe** and seriously diminish the extent of **United States** material assistance at a crucial point. On the contrary he feels that we should seek a plan which would lessen the chance of **United States** involvement in the **Far East** by offering some alternative to that policy of stark

aggression for which extremists and younger officers in **Japan** are now pressing so strongly.’ Craigie suggested British and American co-operation to reach an understanding with **Japan** on a basis including ‘joint assistance to **Japan** in bringing about peace with the Chinese Government on the basis of the restoration of **China**'s independence and integrity’, Japanese respect for Allied territory in the **Pacific**, and financial and economic aid for **Japan**.

The British Government appeared to be in considerable sympathy with this view. In the meantime, however, it was greatly embarrassed by Japanese demands to withdraw the **Shanghai** garrison and close the **Hong Kong** frontier and the **Burma Road** to **China**. It felt it could satisfy the Japanese over the first two, but the last presented serious difficulties. American opinion ran strongly against ‘appeasement’, and the United States Government was putting pressure on **Britain** to resist Japanese demands; but it could not promise support if such resistance brought war. The Americans, it seems, assumed that **Japan** was bluffing; but if she were not, her attack would find British possessions in the **Far East** virtually defenceless. <sup>1</sup> ‘Put bluntly,’ cabled the British Government, ‘our problem is whether we are to incur both **United States** and Chinese odium by stopping traffic or face the consequences of refusal without **United States** support <sup>2</sup>.’

The Australian Government expressed itself in general agreement with Craigie's line of thought but felt that conditions including ‘the complete independence and integrity of **China**’ would be ‘quite impossible of acceptance by **Japan**.’ They would ‘put her in a worse position than at the commencement of hostilities in 1937.’ The immediate Japanese demands should be conceded. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, *Japan's New Order*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to GGNZ, 26 Jun 1940.



<sup>3</sup> SSSA to GGNZ, 2 Jul 1940; PM Aust. to PM NZ, 28 Jun 1940.

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New Zealand, on the other hand, was 'inclined to feel that an acceptance of the Japanese demands or an offer of mediation between **Japan** and **China** might well be interpreted by the Japanese as a plain indication of our realisation of the weakness of our position and of our readiness on that account to sacrifice the Chinese for the purpose of endeavouring to protect our own interests. We are at present inclined to feel that an appearance of continued confidence is more likely to be effective with the Japanese than any step which might be interpreted as a display of weakness... <sup>1</sup>.'

**Britain** finally decided to close the **Burma Road** for three months, a decision announced in the Commons on 18 July. New Zealand protested, both because she had not been kept sufficiently informed regarding British intentions and on the grounds of her general objection to appeasement, which was 'in our view no more likely to be successful in the **Far East** than it was in **Europe**.' The New Zealand Government was most reluctant to be associated with any further moves of that character, yet felt that a course had been set which it would be hard to change: 'having now adopted a policy of concession, any alteration, and particularly any reversal of that policy' might prove to be very dangerous. Moreover, there was danger that **America** would be antagonised. Yet, added the Government sadly, 'while we neither understand nor sympathise with the policy that has been adopted *vis-à-vis* **Japan** we are nevertheless unwilling by stressing this view to add unnecessarily and perhaps uselessly to the difficulties of His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, whose decision on this difficult and delicate matter we have accepted in the past and will no doubt accept in the future <sup>2</sup>.'

None the less New Zealand pressed during September both for a British decision to resist an attack on the Dutch East Indies <sup>3</sup> and to

reopen the **Burma Road** at the end of the three months' period. <sup>4</sup> Her judgment differed from that of **Australia** on both issues, and in each case her government emphasised both the moral aspects of the problem and the effect on **United States** opinion if these were disregarded. The problem of the **Burma Road** was indeed essentially moral rather than material. <sup>5</sup> Few supplies had reached **China** by this route, and the period of closure was the rainy season. In any case, the British attempt to placate **Japan** did not last much longer. The hope, if not the understanding, had been that the closing of the road should be followed by a serious attempt to seek a

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<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 3 Jul 1940.

<sup>2</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 30 Jul 1940.

<sup>3</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 8 Sep 1940.

<sup>4</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 25 Sep 1940.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, p. 170.

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solution to the problem of **Japan**. In fact, though the interval led to a strengthening of **Britain's** position in **Europe** by the defeat of **Hitler's** air assault, it was marked by further Japanese thrusts: by infiltration into Indo- **China**, pressure on the Netherlands Indies for economic concessions, and on 27 September by an alliance with **Italy** and **Germany** by which the parties undertook 'to assist one another with all political, economic and military means if one of the three Contracting Powers is attacked by a Power at present not involved in the European War or in the Chinese-Japanese conflict <sup>1</sup>.'

The Tripartite Pact was intended to prevent American intervention in either **Europe** or **Asia**; its effect was, if anything, to confirm a trend

precisely towards such intervention. The American Government refused formal commitments, and in public spoke harshly about **Britain's** closing of the **Burma Road**; constitutionally, and in deference to its own public opinion, it could have done no other. Yet steps were already being taken to prepare the way for effective action. Anglo-American staff conversations, foreshadowed in June, began in August 1940, and in October it was suggested by **America** that they be extended to include also **Australia**, New Zealand and the **Netherlands**, with a view to planning joint defence in the **Pacific**.<sup>2</sup> On 12 September 1940, Ambassador Grew in **Tokyo**, who had hitherto opposed coercion, told his government that a firm attitude was the only means of restraining **Japan**,<sup>3</sup> and the Americans began to consider means for showing the **Japanese Government** that 'if it chose to pursue an Axis policy it would probably involve itself in war with the **United States**.' By early October American policy had stiffened so much that some Americans were wondering whether they might not find themselves at war in the **Pacific**, with the British Commonwealth neutral. **Britain**, **Australia** and New Zealand very promptly promised to stand beside the **United States** in this eventuality.

Thereafter, 'in shadow rather than [in] open view, the American and British governments began to draw plans for a common front of resistance in the **Pacific** <sup>4</sup>.' The new co-operation extended to planning the strategy of the war in which it seemed so likely the **United States** would become involved. Within a relatively few months some considerable detailed work was completed. In fact the main lines of Allied strategy then laid down for the European area were followed when **America** entered the war. Plans for the **Pacific** were less far-sighted, partly because Japanese strength was grievously underestimated. Nevertheless, the foundations were laid

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<sup>1</sup> Feis, p. 120; Jones, pp. 196 ff.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to UKHC, Wgtn, 7 Oct 1940. Cf. McNeill, *America, Britain and Russia*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup> Feis, p. 128.

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and certain basic problems faced. It may be noted, for instance, that there was no return to the original fundamental plan of a major British fleet arriving at **Singapore** within a defined period after the outbreak of war with **Japan**. Indeed, in March 1941 the British asked for the transfer of part of the United States Pacific Fleet to **Singapore**. This was refused, but it was agreed that the **United States** should increase its forces in the **Atlantic** and **Mediterranean** and thus enable the British to release capital ships for the **Far East**.<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of these talks should not, of course, be entirely concealed from the Japanese, and probably gave them an exaggerated impression of British and American hostility.<sup>2</sup>

In the new situation—basically that of American leadership in resistance to **Japan** with **Britain** following—the grounds of difference in Far Eastern policy that had become marked between the British and New Zealand governments from June to September 1940 naturally disappeared. Indeed, in April 1941, when asked for her comments on measures of economic pressure which the **United Kingdom** was considering in the event of a further Japanese move south, New Zealand, while repeating her opposition to appeasement, stressed the need for caution.<sup>3</sup> However, when, in July, **Japan** occupied bases throughout Indo- **China**, New Zealand fully supported co-operation in the drastic sanctions proposed by the **United States**. This co-operation involved both the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand in denunciation of their commercial treaties with **Japan**; they and the Netherlands Indies fell into line.

The decisive item in the new sanctions was the embargo on oil. 'The Japanese Navy was at once forced to live on its oil reserves, and at the outbreak of the **Pacific** war had in fact consumed four out of eighteen months' supply. It was evident that this was a stranglehold, and that the

choice before them was either for **Japan** to reach an agreement with the **United States** or go to war <sup>4</sup>.’ That these sanctions might very well lead to war was recognised when they were taken, as it had been when they had been previously considered. On 24 July Nash as acting Prime Minister cabled to Fraser in **London** that ‘we are satisfied that the southward move to Indo- **China**, if and when achieved, will not end there but will be used by **Japan** to strengthen bases and to consolidate for yet a further southward move. It does not appear reasonably possible to avoid conflict with **Japan** if Indo- **China** is occupied, and this being so we consider that, if the possibility of conflict is extended by the

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<sup>1</sup> Feis, pp. 166–7; Morison, *US Naval Operations*, Vol. III, pp. 50–1; McNeill, pp. 8 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jones, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> PM NZ to SSDA, 26 Apr 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill, Vol. III, pp. 521–2.

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economic measures proposed and taken by the **United States**, their co-operation in the conflict should be inevitable <sup>1</sup>.’

In short, a firm policy as against Japanese aggression, at one time advocated by New Zealand even against the views of her Commonwealth partners, now commanded New Zealand support when adopted jointly by **Britain** and the **United States**. Yet an underlying uneasiness is shown in the last phrase of her comment. In spite of the vigour of American leadership in applying economic pressure to **Japan**, the lesser powers of the **Pacific**, including the Netherlands Indies, could never be quite certain of **United States** armed support if the policy being followed in common should draw down a Japanese attack on one of them. <sup>2</sup> This anxiety is plain in the speculations of the Commonwealth governments in the weeks remaining before **Pearl Harbour**, and in particular, in the

consultations between the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand and **Australia** as to what should be done in various hypothetical cases of Japanese aggression against certain areas. Should the Commonwealth go to war if the Japanese attacked the Dutch East Indies? Or if they attacked **Thailand**? Or **Russia**?

Dutch and Commonwealth officers had participated in secret staff talks on **Pacific** defence and New Zealand continued to favour a definite guarantee of the Indies. She had been disappointed when this had been deferred in July, partly because of the misgivings of **Australia** and South Africa—‘the customary policy of saying or doing nothing which might be construed as provocative by the Japanese has resulted inevitably in the very situation we were at such pains to avoid <sup>3</sup>’—and again on 16 September Nash as acting Prime Minister cabled to the Secretary of State urging that nothing was to be lost by entering into such a commitment, as, in the New Zealand view, ‘any overt action directed against the **Netherlands East Indies** must inevitably lead to British armed intervention.’ Her reaction in the case of **Thailand** was, however, more hesitant. When, in August, the Australian Government expressed itself in favour of a declaration, if necessary by the Commonwealth countries alone, that Japanese attack on **Thailand** would be a *casus belli*, the **New Zealand Government** was reserved. ‘It seems to them unwise to take such action unless and until there is available a force sufficiently strong to ensure successful resistance to **Japan** in the area threatened. The result of any hasty or ill-conceived guarantee might well be repetition of the circumstances surrounding the British guarantee to **Poland** in 1939....the result of a defeat in this region such as we experienced in **Norway**, in **Belgium**, in **Greece**, and in **Crete** arising

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<sup>1</sup> Actg PM to Fraser, 24 Jul 1941; Fraser to Actg PM, 25 Jul 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Feis, p. 322; Jones, p. 265.

from any premature or ill-conceived attempt to assist the Thais, could not fail to have the most disastrous results, particularly in the **United States** <sup>1</sup>.' The New Zealand Government was likewise cautious when, at the end of October, the Australian Government proposed a declaration that a Japanese attack on **Russia** would be resisted by the Commonwealth. Although it thought it inevitable in such a case that the Commonwealth should go to war, it felt also that in view of the 'obviously limited scale of operations' which could be launched against **Japan** such a declaration 'might....be viewed by **Japan** as a challenge to immediate action, and be considered as premature and too precipitate by the **United States** <sup>2</sup>.'

At a time when **Australia** was showing unwonted boldness in Far Eastern policy—partly, it seems, because Menzies was irritated at British fatalism in face of the drift towards war with **Japan**, and because the new Labour government was optimistic about **Russia's** possible weight in the **Far East** <sup>3</sup>—New Zealand sounded a note of caution. Her comments tended not towards inaction, but towards a realistic assessment of practical factors. Such caution may well have been stimulated by the heavy losses recently suffered in **Greece** and **Crete**, which brought home to New Zealand with painful emphasis that the case for assisting a victim of aggression depends on the degree of probability that the assistance will be of some use. It was also calculated in relation to that other factor, on the essential importance of which all agreed: the necessity of American support. 'We feel that if we are prepared to fight **America** will not...desert us,' said Menzies for **Australia**. <sup>4</sup> 'A bold course ought to change the whole outlook.' New Zealand's calculation was that **America** was much less likely to be precipitated into war by a Japanese attack on **Thailand** or **Russia** than by an attack on British territory or on the Dutch East Indies, especially if this attack were provoked by a policy adopted under **United States** inspiration. <sup>5</sup> In such circumstances it is not surprising that New Zealand should at this stage emphasise the



argument of the Commonwealth's limited ability to resist **Japan**, an argument which she had, perhaps, treated rather lightly in 1940 when the British had used it in the cases of the **Burma Road** and the proposed guarantee of the Dutch East Indies.

By October 1941, then, New Zealand had found something like a balance between the three main considerations influencing Far Eastern policy: her attachment to principle as the soundest guide to practical action, her realisation of the Commonwealth's weakness,

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<sup>1</sup> Actg PM NZ to PM Aust., 14 Aug 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Hasluck, p. 546; PM NZ to PM Aust., 31 Oct 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Hasluck, Ch. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 531.

<sup>5</sup> Actg PM NZ to SSSA, 25 Jul 1941.

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and her desire to obtain firm assurance (as distinct from reasonable expectation) of American participation.

September and October 1941 were a period of comparatively relaxed tension, even of hope. American service chiefs became fairly confident of being able to hold the thrust. <sup>1</sup> Churchill at this time allowed himself a somewhat surprising optimism in his comments. 'I confess,' he wrote later, 'that in my mind the whole Japanese menace lay in a sinister twilight, compared with our other needs', and that if Japanese aggression drew in **America** he would be 'content to have it <sup>2</sup>.' On 2 September he cabled to Fraser that 'I cannot believe that the Japanese will face the combination now developing around them. We may therefore regard the situation not only as more favourable but as less tense.' As late as 25 October, when announcing the decision to send the



battleship *Prince of Wales* to join the *Repulse* in the **Indian Ocean** 'in order further to deter **Japan**', he expressed the view that that country would not enter the war unless or until **Russia** was decisively broken. <sup>3</sup>

Such optimism was to this extent justified: that, in the confusion of Japanese politics, there was still a strong peace party in **Tokyo**. <sup>4</sup> Its battle was a losing one, however, and service preparation proceeded. On 6 September a full Imperial Conference laid it down that preparations for war against the **United States**, **Britain** and the Dutch must be completed by the end of October. Diplomacy should continue, but unless by early October there appeared to be reasonable hope of securing **Japan's** minimum demands, an immediate decision should be made to get ready for war. <sup>5</sup> These demands included the restoration of trade relations and the end of aid to **China**. Roosevelt refused pressing requests by the Prime Minister, **Prince Konoye**, for a meeting to discuss ways of improving relations; and on 16 October Konoye resigned, to be succeeded by **General Tojo**, the head of the war party in the cabinet. The new cabinet still was not pledged to war. The High Command insisted earnestly, however, that the plans it was preparing must be acted upon before the end of the year, or postponed for almost twelve months to await favourable weather; during which period **Japan** would use up her reserves, especially of oil, while **Britain** and **America** would build up their strength in South-east **Asia**. <sup>6</sup> After hard debate, this reasoning was accepted on 5 November; the formal decision was then made that unless negotiations with the **USA** bore fruit by 25 November, the armed forces were to attack. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hasluck, p. 543; McNeill, pp. 12–13.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, Vol. III, p. 522.

<sup>3</sup> Hasluck, p. 543.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, Chs. VIII and IX.

<sup>5</sup> Feis, p. 265; Jones, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> Jones, p. 295.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 297; Feis, p. 295.

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At this stage negotiations were, in fact, in American hands, in spite of some Japanese efforts to make the British take a more active part. The Japanese pointed out that the British Commonwealth had no share in discussions whose outcome would affect them closely, and they suggested that the British, while no more likely than the Americans to surrender principles, might be more skilful in avoiding a 'frontal clash at this time <sup>1</sup>.' The British Government, however, was well content. A 'cardinal feature' of its Far Eastern policy was to keep 'strictly in line with the **United States**', and the best practical means of achieving this was to allow the Americans to lead the way; moreover, American strength in that area was vastly preponderant. Accordingly, it was British policy to 'confidently and wholeheartedly follow [ **America's**] lead even if on points of detail or method we may sometimes see things in a different light <sup>2</sup>.'

With this view New Zealand seems to have concurred. Her government received through **London** very full information about the negotiations, but her opinion was not asked, nor, until 24 November, offered. On the previous day there had been reported to her the latest Japanese proposals, together with some suggested American counter-proposals which would have provided the peace party in **Japan** with some evidence of progress in the negotiations, and also have given the American army and navy time to continue their preparations in the **Pacific**. These proposals involved some economic relief for **Japan** in return for a partial withdrawal from Indo- **China**. <sup>3</sup> The New Zealand Government reaffirmed its opposition to any steps that might increase Japanese pressure in **China**, agreed that the Japanese proposals were

clearly unacceptable, but in view of the desirability for the closest possible co-operation with the **United States** was 'strongly of opinion that the Governments of the British Commonwealth should concur', if the American Government wished to proceed along the lines suggested. 'If such an arrangement were ultimately found to be possible (as to which they must express some doubt) then the general effect on the world situation of a Japanese withdrawal from Indo- **China** must be most salutary, while the prospect of a successful attack upon the **Burma Road** must be materially decreased. If it failed, the time that would be gained would be exceedingly valuable to our cause, provided care is taken to ensure that the negotiations are not accepted by **Japan** as a mark of weakness <sup>4</sup>.' Despite these considerations, the plan received no very definite support from the British, **Netherlands** and Australian governments and was violently

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<sup>1</sup> SSSA to PM NZ, 10 Nov 1941. Jones, p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to PM NZ, 10 Nov 1941.

<sup>3</sup> SSSA to PM NZ, 23 Nov 1941.

<sup>4</sup> PM NZ to SSSA, 24. Nov 1941.

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opposed by the Chinese. In view of this and of American doubts as to the reception of the proposals, it was abandoned, and with it there disappeared the last, doubtful hope of delaying war in the **Pacific**.

<sup>3</sup>SSSA to PM NZ, 23 Nov 1941.

<sup>4</sup>PM NZ to SSSA, 24 Nov 1941.

In Washington, negotiations moved towards breakdown in the 'sinister twilight' which obscured Anglo-American understanding of the consequences of their oil embargo. **Japan**, despite the lingering

resistance of a peace party, was committed since early September to a short timetable; unless the diplomats could produce results by the end of November, the armed forces would strike within a few days. The Americans had broken the Japanese codes, and accordingly could read a considerable range of intercepted messages. These gave the American Government—and, after January 1941, the British—a clear enough picture of Japanese intentions, though it seems they did not know of the precise decision to go to war at the beginning of December. <sup>1</sup> In spite of intercepted messages, however, Churchill and Roosevelt and their chief advisers could not quite bring themselves to believe that, when it came to the point, the Japanese would attack a firm Anglo-American combination. To do so, it was felt, would be 'an act of suicide'. To the last moment, therefore, there remained in their minds the possibility that **Japan's** propositions, seen by the Japanese as the last moves in lengthy discussions, were intended to keep the conversations alive indefinitely. Accordingly, on 26 November, **Japan** was given a reply which reasserted the general American position. It was a possible move in long-term negotiations, and a reassurance to some sections of American opinion. To the **Japanese Government**, with only a few days in hand, it meant the 'total surrender of **Japan** to the American position....That surrender, as we saw it, would have amounted to national suicide.' The diplomats had reached deadlock, and after a further brief struggle of opinion in **Tokyo** the view prevailed that **Japan** could not carry on economically in defiance of the embargoes, and that war was the only possible course. On 1 December the decision to fight was finally endorsed. <sup>2</sup>

In the first few days of December, some final decisions were taken on the kind of action that the Commonwealth should take to meet the new Japanese advance that was now clearly imminent, but of which the direction could not be foretold. At last this could be done with firm knowledge of American support in resisting any thrust from **Japan**. On 1 December New Zealand agreed with a British plan to seize the Kra Isthmus in **Siam**, with or without

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 313–18.

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Siamese approval, if a Japanese fleet approached. <sup>1</sup> Britain had an explicit assurance of armed support from the United States if she became involved in war over this plan, or in defence of the Indies or of her own territories; <sup>2</sup> and on 6 December two large Japanese convoys were reported off Cambodia Point. <sup>3</sup> When news came of Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour and Malaya, there was at least no doubt in anyone's mind that the Pacific war was America's war, and that, in the long run, American power was beyond reckoning.

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<sup>1</sup> PM NZ to SSSA, 1 Dec 1941.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to PM NZ, 5 Dec 1941.

<sup>3</sup> SSSA to PM NZ, 7 Dec 1941.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 16 – A SECOND FRONT

## CHAPTER 16

### *A Second Front*

**THE** astonishment of New Zealanders—as of the rest of the world—at the news of the Japanese attacks was not due to lack of warning. The likelihood of a southward thrust by **Japan** had long been a commonplace of political discussion. Her renewed attack on **China** in 1937 and her subsequent conduct of the **China** ‘incident’ was fresh in mind during the early days of the war. Indeed, among New Zealanders interested in the **Far East** there was, if anything, a tendency to simplify the problem, stressing the difficulties genuinely facing **Tokyo** and under-emphasising the factors which might have led to compromise solutions. When war came in 1939, New Zealand thankfully took advantage of **Japan's** revulsion against the Russo-German Pact, and hoped that her neutrality would continue. Yet the obvious calculation was widely made: that **Japan** would take advantage of the European war to push her own cause, and each reverse for the Western Powers in the European theatre would be followed by pressure against their possessions in the East. So, in fact, it turned out. In 1940 and 1941 the newspapers periodically gave full reports of **Japan's** diplomatic and military progress, to which was added, as the months passed, news of **America's** growing counter-measures. In the main this information, and newspaper comment upon it, was marked by the characteristic pre-war New Zealand attitude of detachment. These things were happening; many of them were grievous; but they were occurrences in another world.

It was not so very long since New Zealanders in their hearts had viewed even **Europe** in this way: a stage on which a fascinating drama took place, but a drama which, if it affected the Dominion at all, did so with uncontrollable fatality; New Zealand suffered impacts from an outer world which was utterly remote from New Zealand influence. This passive colonial attitude was not unchallenged in the nineteenth century and it gradually lost its dominance, though not its influence, between the two wars. It was vigorously challenged on the one hand by J. G. Coates, and on the other by the leaders of the Labour Party; and it



was eaten away by New Zealand's growing national consciousness in the ten years that followed the great depression. It clung longest in relation to the 'Far' East; yet in newspaper and parliamentary comment there appeared increasing reminders of New Zealand's involvement in **Pacific** issues. And these were reinforced from time to time by broad hints from political leaders. As early as January 1940 Fraser said publicly with unusual bluntness that **Japan** was a potential enemy, against whom **Britain** was New Zealand's sole protector. <sup>1</sup> A year later Coates, then a member of War Cabinet, and Fraser himself reminded New Zealanders with some force, if with circumlocution, that New Zealand was seriously threatened by developments in the **Pacific** as well as by the current crisis in the European theatre. <sup>2</sup> In July the Leader of the Opposition called off a parliamentary debate largely on the ground that the **Pacific** situation 'has become too grave to permit of party wrangling <sup>3</sup>.' As the crisis approached, official warnings became about as plain as was possible when the prospective attacker was still technically friendly, and when delicate negotiations were still in hand. <sup>4</sup> Finally, when chastising the Opposition for playing party politics, Fraser on 4 December said that he was hourly expecting 'the most serious developments in the **Pacific**'; <sup>5</sup> he had been told on 30 November of the message just sent to American naval and military authorities in the **Pacific** that 'an aggressive move is expected by **Japan**, possibly within the next few days <sup>6</sup>.'

Such warnings were sufficiently explicit; moreover, in view of the generally accepted interpretation of the character of the **Japanese Government**, it would have been foolhardy to expect **Japan** to yield tamely to the acute pressure applied to them since July. These facts were realised, New Zealand opinion certainly hardened towards **Japan**, and an awareness of danger spread gradually among the community. Yet public understanding lagged far behind the pace of events. Looking back, responsible men were astonished to recall the 'apathy' and 'stupor' of New Zealanders in the face of danger. The Prime Minister, said a prominent legislative councillor in March 1942, <sup>7</sup> had given warning in October 1941, but the people 'simply did not believe it. They preferred to go about their business as usual, and they would not, even at that stage,

bring themselves to a realisation of the position, or bring themselves even to examine the warnings which had been given to them.' These were strong words by an angry man. New Zealanders were not alone in being deceived by the Japanese timetable. If they paid too little attention

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<sup>1</sup> **Auckland Star**, 19 Jan 1940; *Press*, 20 Jan 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 8 and 15 Feb 1941.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 259, p. 522.

<sup>4</sup> Coates, *Press*, 20 Aug 1941; Fraser, *Press*, 24 and 25 Oct 1941; Fraser, *New Zealand Herald*, 21 Nov 1941.

<sup>5</sup> *Evening Post*, 5 Dec 1941.

<sup>6</sup> SSSA to PM NZ, 30 Nov 1941; cf.

<sup>7</sup> W. Perry, later member of War Cabinet, *NZPD*, Vol. 261, pp. 71-2.

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to the **Pacific** arena this was only in part due to their affection for peacetime ways of living. It was in part at least due to preoccupations with critical events in **Europe** and **Africa**, where the New Zealand Division, after anxious preparation, went into action in the very days when fateful decisions were reached in **Tokyo** and Washington. Yet New Zealand's reaction to the new crisis was conditioned by the abruptness as well as the success of the Japanese attack.

These successes were startling enough, even when filtered by censorship. New Zealanders were well accustomed to bad tidings, and to reading between the lines. Their wildest fears scarcely touched the reality of Japanese success at **Pearl Harbour**; yet they realised well enough that a crippling blow had been struck at the United States Pacific Fleet, and that Japanese forces had landed in **Malaya** and the **Philippines**. The arrival at **Singapore** of two capital ships, *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, was a relief and encouragement. On 10 December both were lost, and in the days that followed the Japanese made spectacular advances in both **Malaya** and the **Philippines**. As Churchill commented at the time, American and British losses had almost overnight given the Japanese 'full battle-fleet command of **Pacific**. They can attack with any force overseas at any point <sup>1</sup>.' Though no one said as much in public, fears fermented in men's minds, and enough was published to make the whole situation tolerably clear.

The war thus acquired a shocking and unprecedented immediacy for the mass of New Zealanders, and the ill-equipped men watching the beaches had very genuine fears of actual invasion. On the whole the reaction of the public—like that of the Government—was less violent in New Zealand than in **Australia**. There was, however, some very sharp newspaper criticism of those responsible for the higher direction of the

war. For instance, on 29 January 1942 the *New Zealand Herald* commented bitterly on Churchill's statement that 'while facing **Germany** and **Italy** we never had sufficient arms to provide effectively for the defence of the **Far East**.' Why, then, asked the *Herald*, had the countries now menaced by **Japan** not been told of this and why had **India**, **Australia** and New Zealand been 'allowed to continue the despatch of fighting-men to the **Middle East** and to **Britain**?' Why 'did the Allies adopt a policy towards **Japan** that made war inevitable?' While 'the conclusion cannot be escaped that the primary responsibility for provoking war with **Japan** rests upon President Roosevelt', Churchill was also blamed for failing to assure himself that an adequate defence would be forthcoming for British territories in the East. It was tough comment. The

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, Vol. III, p. 554.

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of the *Herald* for publishing it seems to have been seriously considered, though this was abandoned on legal advice.

The *Herald's* comments were, of course, exceptional; most editorial comment was both calmer and less well-informed. But there does seem to have been at this time, as was natural enough, 'a growing feeling of discontent and frustration among many people over the trend of recent events <sup>1</sup>.' The phrase was used by S. G. Holland, Leader of the Opposition, in describing the impressions formed during a recent tour through New Zealand. At the end of January Fraser cabled to Churchill that without fighter protection for **Auckland** and **Wellington** 'the government may have to face serious repercussions in the morale of the public, which may lead to an appreciable diminution in the total war effort <sup>2</sup>.'

Moreover, restiveness in **Australia** and New Zealand was stimulated

by the consequences of the principle of 'beating **Germany** first' which had been formulated by Anglo-American service planning early in 1941,<sup>3</sup> and confirmed by Churchill and Roosevelt at their recent meeting. On 7 February Fraser cabled to Churchill that 'I feel you should be told that the ill-informed comments emanating recently from **America** and elsewhere concerning the very large forces retained inactive in the **United Kingdom** as compared with the needs elsewhere, the despatch of American troops to Northern Ireland, and the use of Dominion forces in the **Middle East** have been taken up with some force in this Dominion and were indeed reflected, with some degree of embarrassment to us, at the secret session of Parliament yesterday.' Commenting on the news that the New Zealand Division had just been ordered to move for a full operational role in the **Western Desert**—an order cancelled on New Zealand's protest—Fraser added that coming after heavy losses suffered by the Division in the fighting at the end of 1941 this might well add point 'to a demand that the New Zealand Forces should be returned to the **Pacific** area to meet the danger nearer home <sup>4</sup>.'

This cable was an appeal to Churchill for information wherewith to answer current criticism. There was, in fact, enough public uneasiness to cause concern to the Government, and it naturally increased as the victorious progress of the Japanese continued through February and March. Nevertheless, Fraser could fairly report to Churchill on 11 February that public opinion was sound and was 'reacting healthily to bad news <sup>5</sup>.' There was much less

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 20 Jan 1942.

<sup>2</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 30 Jan 1942.

<sup>3</sup> McNeill, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 93.

suggestion of hysteria than there had been in the crisis of mid-1940. A number of public meetings were held, for example, particularly in rural districts in the northern half of the **North Island**. They had, however, less of a political flavour than those of 1940 and, as was to be expected, were more concerned with the immediate task of improvising methods of defence against invasion. Their inspiration was a mushroom 'Awake, New Zealand' movement, which was launched in **Hamilton** towards the end of February. Its main practical activity was to secure funds for the manufacture in **Hamilton** of arms and equipment for the Home Guard. It was, said the Prime Minister, an exciting expression of democracy in action; and for two or three months it expressed with great vigour the public will to action without becoming harnessed to party politics. It then faded naturally away. <sup>1</sup>

Another current of opinion was expressed at the annual conference of the Federation of Labour at the beginning of April. This showed that there was general resentment among the trade unions—or at least among their leadership—at the degree to which the **New Zealand Government** was believed to have acquiesced in the British Government's war policy. A motion recommended by the national executive, and adopted unanimously by the conference, urged a more critical attitude; and Angus McLagan, president of the Federation, who was shortly to become a member of cabinet, urged the Government to follow the example of the Australian Government. This, he said, was 'standing on its own legs' instead of 'refraining from criticism where criticism is not only justified but absolutely necessary <sup>2</sup>.'

Too much stress should not be laid upon public criticisms of war policy in the early part of 1942. They played their part in the formation of the War Administration later in the year, but—except in so far as members of the Government shared the general feeling—it does not seem that the Government's defence policy was influenced by them in

anything like the way it had been when conscription was introduced eighteen months earlier. Public opinion, if not tranquil, was not cantankerous, nor was there substantial, organised criticism with concrete purposes. This time the Government led the way instead of being driven.

The possibility—indeed the ultimate probability—of Japanese hostility was a factor never absent from the thinking on defence of the **New Zealand Government** and its technical advisers. The situation was anxiously weighed before the first echelon of the Expeditionary Force was despatched, and, said the Chiefs of Staff on

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<sup>1</sup> *Northern Advocate*, 13 May 1942; *Evening Post*, 31 Mar 1942; *Hawera Star*, 21 May 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Standard*, 9 Apr 1942.

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23 February 1940, it was assumed that, if **Japan** entered the war, ‘defence of New Zealand ... will take precedence over the maintenance of 2 N.Z.E.F.’ When the fall of **France** left New Zealand with little prospect of British protection against a Japanese move southwards, the whole problem had to be surveyed again. The Government spent anxious weeks considering whether or not to despatch overseas the third echelon of the Expeditionary Force. If, it reflected, ‘the Third Echelon leaves this Dominion there is at the present moment no force available in this country whose training is in any way comparable with that of the Third Echelon, which is in itself only partially trained... the absence of trained troops in adequate numbers would be a particular disadvantage here in case of attack because of the length of New Zealand's coastline and the numerous harbours and open beaches offering ready facilities for a landing... the Third Echelon on departure would naturally take with it a proportion of the available supplies of arms and equipment, already far from adequate <sup>1</sup>.’ However, the Government accepted the view that ‘in the last resort this Dominion must stand or fall according to the

decision in the main theatres of war, and that as a corollary it would be wise to have all possible forces at decisive points...'; and they ardently desired to concentrate the New Zealand Division as soon as possible. The decision was accordingly taken that the Third Echelon should proceed, as the British Government wished, to the **Middle East**. From the reinforcements that would otherwise have gone with it, however, three thousand men were withheld to provide a force that it had been decided at the beginning of June to send to **Fiji**.<sup>2</sup> This force, 8 Brigade Group, was garrisoned at **Fiji** at the time of the attack on **Pearl Harbour**.

The arguments that presented themselves for and against the despatch of the Third Echelon show how very difficult was the problem of home defence during this period and, indeed, why no effective land force had been built up by December 1941. Apart from men in camp as reinforcements for the NZEF the country was dependent at that time on the Territorial Force, supplemented by the National Military Reserve. Of the National Military Reserve, 1150 members had been permanently mobilised as coastwatchers or guards for vital points. Its 7800 other members received only about a week or ten days' training each year. It was a voluntary force and its membership was rather mixed as far as age groups and medical gradings were concerned, though it included a large number of returned soldiers of the First World War.

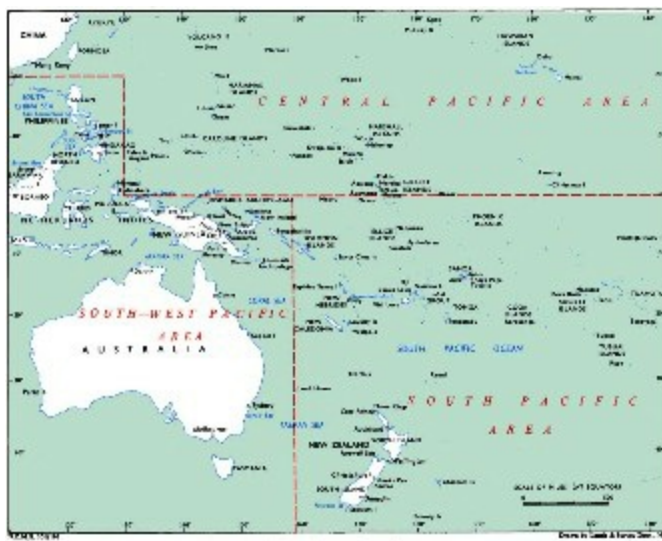
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<sup>1</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 3 Aug 1940; *Documents*, I, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172, and O. A. Gillespie, *The Pacific*, p. 22.

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South-west Pacific  
South-West Pacific

**The Territorial Force itself was about 31,000 strong, but still suffered from the disorganisation caused by the withdrawal of men for the Division overseas. At first, separate ballots covering the same classes of men had been held for home and overseas service. Since men called in Territorial ballots found themselves later called in overseas ballots, which naturally had first priority, entry into the Territorial Force was later restricted to men not eligible for service in the NZEF—that is, men medically unfit for overseas service, youths of 18 to 20 and men of 41 to 45. Single men only were affected, as the Government had not begun to call up married men for service either within New Zealand or overseas. The Territorial Force was not mobilised, but its members received three months' initial training, two weeks' annual camp, and out-of-camp parades. General Sir Guy Williams, called in by the [New Zealand Government](#) to report on the defence of the country, criticised the composition of this force, and observed that it was not fit for active service and with its existing tempo of training never could be. He made recommendations for its improvement, some of which were being put into effect when the Japanese attacked [Pearl Harbour](#).<sup>1</sup> At that time, 5700 Territorials were mobilised, and the remainder of the force was due to enter camp within the next few months to begin the two months' annual training which had been recommended by Williams.**

**The means of stopping an enemy force from reaching the country**

were as slender as those for dealing with it once it arrived. So far as naval defence was concerned, ships could not be concentrated for its defence until the threat really arose. But the activities of German raiders in the **Pacific** in the latter part of 1940 were a painful reminder of the Dominion's exposure, and there was a tantalising memory of the thirty **Wellington** bombers on order for New Zealand which had been placed at the disposal of the British Government at the outbreak of war. Reminding Churchill of this on 4 December 1940, Fraser observed that We have constantly borne in mind the necessity of taking a large view and of balancing our needs with those elsewhere in the common cause, but we wonder if it is fully realised in the **United Kingdom** how helpless this Dominion is against attacks from seaward. As you know, the whole of our defence measures were built on the assurance that in time of potential trouble in these waters adequate naval forces would be available. They are not. We make no complaint of this and we have very much welcomed your assurance that if the worse came to the worst naval assistance would be forthcoming. But at present local naval forces are far from adequate to protect New

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum for War Cabinet, 3 Jul 1941.

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Zealand shores and shipping against attack, and it is a plain fact that at present the New Zealand Air Force possess not one single aircraft suitable either for reconnaissance or for attack against a raider at any substantial distance from the shores of New Zealand.' His plea, not for the first time, was for a few Hudsons to use against raiders and Churchill promised to meet it. <sup>1</sup> By December 1941 thirty-six of these aircraft had arrived in New Zealand.

Preparations within New Zealand were, of course, supplemented so far as possible by consultations with probable allies. In particular, a series of service conferences in **Singapore** between October 1940 and April 1941 did something to co-ordinate the planning of **Britain** and the Dominions with that of the **United States** and the Dutch. <sup>2</sup> The actual

outbreak of war, however, and **Japan's** devastating initial success, confronted the New Zealand service chiefs with new and anxious calculations. Unfortunately, records of the advice given to the Government by its Chiefs of Staff in the crucial period just after **Pearl Harbour** are incomplete. It appears, however, that on 8 December they argued that the danger of hit-and-run raids by the Japanese should not be allowed 'to contain us in such a way that we are unable to exercise our full effort to the best advantage....' Consequently the reinforcements for the NZEF should not be held back if adequate naval escorts were available, nor was the mobilisation of the Territorial Force necessary; though some 4600 fortress troops should be mobilised. At about the same date they 'expressed the opinion that until **Singapore** fell and until the **United States** naval forces suffered a major defeat, invasion of New Zealand was most improbable, and ... in their opinion six months must elapse before there could be any danger of invasion of New Zealand.' On 30 December they revised this estimate. 'They still regarded invasion of New Zealand as improbable and still held that a major defeat of the **United States** fleet was an essential condition. But as such a defeat could conceivably occur in a matter of hours, it then became a question as to how long it would take **Japan** to capture **Singapore** and also to prepare an expedition of the size required for invasion of New Zealand, and the estimate of three months was arrived at <sup>3</sup>.'

Three months was a desperately short time to improvise a fighting force of the size required to defend New Zealand, and action was immediate. Mobilisation was ordered for 10 January. <sup>4</sup> Even before

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<sup>1</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 14 Dec 1940.

<sup>2</sup> General Percival's report, Supplement to the *London Gazette* of 26 Feb 1948; Gillespie, pp. 11, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum from GOC to Minister of Defence, 3 Aug 1942; Fraser to Churchill, 12 Jan 1942.

the Japanese attacked, the Government had approved an expansion of Territorial strength to 38,700, and this was now increased to 66,000. On 20 January a gazette was issued calling up married men without children for home service, and on 29 January War Cabinet endorsed recommendations of the **Defence and Military Affairs Committee of the War Council** that future call-ups should be for general service—both within and without New Zealand. New Zealand's land defence was reorganised, as General Williams had recommended, on a 'one army basis', and its strength rose rapidly. By the end of March the figure was 67,000, <sup>1</sup> or about the equivalent of three divisions; but by this stage the official estimate was that six divisions were required for the defence of the country; and of these six it seemed that only one could be secured from abroad.

These drastic demands on New Zealand's manpower precipitated the virtual extension of conscription into civilian life. Power to control the labour force of the Dominion had existed since mid-1940, when the National Service Regulations gave the Minister of National Service power to require any person over sixteen years of age to perform any non-military service necessary for the war effort. The Government had laid some emphasis on this vast power, principally it would seem as a demonstration to Labour supporters that the new measures did not provide merely for military conscription. After the excitement of mid-1940, however, the provisions for industrial conscription were allowed to sink into the background. As the manpower shortage became acute during 1941 the question of using them was raised; but the view of the Government was that 'Such direct action tends to antagonise the workers and is unsatisfactory both to themselves and their employers <sup>2</sup>.' On 28 November 1941, however, the National Service Department reported that the output of essential industries 'already working with labour forces at a bare minimum' was likely to be seriously endangered by the combined effects of military requirements and the competition of

less essential industries. The latter danger was 'chiefly engendered by the unrestricted spiralling of wages offering, particularly in less essential industries favourably placed to entice labour by such means.' The problem was therefore bound up with that of the stabilisation of wages and prices; but the Department recommended that measures for the control and direction of labour should be introduced. <sup>3</sup> It must be assumed that these recommendations would not have been committed to paper unless there was considerable likelihood of their acceptance, but any doubt was

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Strengths and Losses in the Armed Services and Mercantile Marine, Parliamentary paper H-19B, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Minister of National Service to Secy, Fed. Taranaki Co-op. Dairy Factories, 24 Oct 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Director of National Service to Minister of National Service, 28 Nov 1941.

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dissipated by the Japanese attack; and on 10 January 1942 amendments to the National Service regulations provided for the direction of civilian manpower.

However skilfully disposed of, New Zealand's manpower remained minute in face of the enormously increased demand now imposed upon it. In these circumstances nothing could be done to reinforce the New Zealand forces in the **Middle East**. The 8th Reinforcements were for the time being incorporated into the home army and until December 1942 no more men were sent to the NZEF. On the other hand, the Japanese attack made it necessary to strengthen New Zealand's outlying defences in the **Pacific**. 'There was not one anti-aircraft gun in the South West Pacific in November 1941 and the strength of the defences would not have deterred the most irresolute enemy <sup>1</sup>.' And the importance of **Fiji** in particular was being greatly increased by the work on **Nandi** aerodrome,

which was to be one of the landing grounds in the 'Reinforcement Line' for American aircraft flying to the **Far East**. 'So long as we hold the Islands, large scale operations against New Zealand are unlikely,' reported the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff on 7 December. Accordingly, another 4000 men were sent to bring up to two-brigade strength the New Zealand force which had been in **Fiji** since November 1940. Much of the artillery in New Zealand was also sent including, as Fraser cabled Churchill on 24 December, <sup>2</sup> 'the only (four) heavy anti-aircraft guns and the only (four) Bofors guns which we possess'.

Apart from desperate efforts to do what could be done with scanty local resources, the Japanese menace naturally brought big changes in New Zealand's external policy, and led to a new insistence that her voice should be heard in matters concerning the strategy of **Pacific** warfare. The defence of **Fiji** was a New Zealand responsibility, and on 24 December <sup>3</sup> Fraser urged Churchill, who was then in **Washington**, to impress upon President Roosevelt the extreme importance of the islands, not solely or primarily as an outpost of the defence of New Zealand, but as an essential link with the **United States** in the general Allied scheme of operations in the **Pacific** and the **Far East**, and to request him to supply as quickly and completely as possible various deficiencies in the equipment of the forces in **Fiji** and New Zealand. The Dominion's attitude was further expressed with vigour, in a long cable from Fraser to Churchill on 12 January 1942. Fraser recalled that New Zealand had 'never deviated from a complete recognition of the fact that the critical theatre of war has, up to the present at any

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<sup>1</sup> Gillespie, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 328, Appendix II.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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rate, been the European theatre'; and had never let apprehensions



about the territorial safety of New Zealand interfere with the 'primary duty of applying the greatest force that we could provide at the most useful point.' Nevertheless, he added, 'to be completely frank, we have not always felt that the potential problems of the Pacific have had the importance attached to them in London which we, more intimately concerned therewith, have considered that they have perhaps deserved. Whether this be so or not, it seems essential that the position in the Pacific should be treated now as one of at least equal importance to that in Europe and in the Middle East....' He went on to express his disappointment at the failure to set up a unified command for the whole Pacific area, and reiterated his fear that limited commands such as that then about to operate under General Wavell for Burma, Malaya, the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies might lead to the Allies being defeated piecemeal.

In the period when the war had its principal manifestations in Europe, continued Fraser, New Zealand had been 'content very largely to abide by the decisions of the British Government and the British Chiefs of Staff, who were not only closer to the problems but more vitally affected by the repercussions of any immediate decision that was taken. Now, however, that the war has moved to our doorstep, I am sure you will agree that where the matters under discussion are of immediate and direct concern to us there must be some method devised by which we can intelligently form and explicitly express our views before action is taken.... Mr Eden has recently announced that Canada and New Zealand are satisfied with the existing situations in this connection, but this is not strictly accurate. What I said was that I did not consider it feasible for the Prime Ministers of the Dominions to be constantly or substantially in session in London and thus be away from their own more immediate responsibilities, or for one Prime Minister to represent all the Dominions.'

So far as the defence of New Zealand was concerned, the Government which was 'responsible for the lives and safety of this Dominion' could not wholly divest itself of this responsibility in favour

of expert opinion, however authoritative. It had constantly been maintained in the past by the Chiefs of Staff both in the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand that there was no 'immediate large-scale threat to the territory of **Australia** and much less of New Zealand', an opinion expressed from **London** as late as 11 December. 'Frankly,' wrote Fraser, 'we do not accept this, and, even if we did accept it, prudence and the demands of our own people would oblige us to prepare against the worst. He recalled that, only a few months before, 'the highest military authority' pronounced New Zealand and **Fiji** to be 'in no danger of serious attack unless in the "unthinkable" contingency of the British and American fleets being driven from the **Pacific** and **Singapore** having fallen.... Our reflection on this is that the unthinkable is now in everyone's mind.' New Zealand, he concluded, had very little knowledge of the intentions of those responsible for the higher direction of the war, practically none of American intentions. 'We feel we must have an eye, an ear and a voice wherever decisions affecting New Zealand are to be made and we are by no means happy with the arrangements so far as we know them for the conduct of the war against **Japan** <sup>1</sup>.'

Churchill replied at length. On the two major points raised, he wrote that he found the idea of a unified command for the Indian and **Pacific** oceans 'more attractive in theory than, in my view, it could work out in practice, unless it were possible for the United States Navy Department and British Admiralty, with the Naval Boards of **Australia** and New Zealand and of the Dutch Government, to be merged into one large united national [ sic] Navy Department.' He was, however, 'entirely sympathetic' to the New Zealand desire for a place in the framing of **Pacific** war policy, and had suggested 'that a body should be formed in **London** with representatives, on a Ministerial plane, of the Australian, New Zealand and Dutch Governments' to deal with major problems concerning the **Pacific**. <sup>2</sup> The Australians had pressed, with even greater vehemence, for a share in the overall strategic planning for the **Pacific** area; and both the South Pacific dominions felt that Churchill's plan was very far from meeting their needs. In particular, it gave them no direct contact with the American authorities, though it was clear that



power in the so-called 'Anzac' area— **Australia**, New Zealand and part of **New Guinea**—would rest in American hands; unless indeed it were in those of **Japan**.

The Pacific War Council was duly set up in **London**, but on the insistence of **Australia** and New Zealand, Churchill took up with Roosevelt their plea for direct representation at the policy-forming level in Washington. <sup>3</sup> The Americans were a good deal less than enthusiastic. They were even less inclined than the British to submit conundrums of high strategy to discussion by a team of smaller

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<sup>1</sup> At the Churchill-Roosevelt discussions of December 1941 Roosevelt at one stage proposed that Australian, New Zealand and Dutch representatives be attached in an advisory capacity to a committee in **Washington** which (under Roosevelt and Churchill) would be responsible for the direction of the **Pacific** war. As 'everybody and his grandmother' wanted to be represented on this committee, it was finally decided to assign the job of advising the President to the British and American group known as the Combined Chiefs of Staff.— *Hopkins Papers*, Vol. I, p. 481.

<sup>2</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 17 Jan 1942.

<sup>3</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 20 and 26 Jan 1942.

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nations, and the American armed forces were always very sensitive to civilian meddling from whatever source. Roosevelt accordingly replied that the general feeling of his Chiefs of Staff was that political matters concerning New Zealand, **Australia** and the Dutch East Indies should continue to be handled in **London** and military matters decided in Washington. To add three men representing each of these countries to the joint staff considering ABDA <sup>1</sup> problems would create an altogether unwieldy body; but in cases where their interests were concerned the staff would invite the participation of the military missions, whose advice would be 'considered important and essential in determining the

general policies of the war in the ABDA area <sup>2</sup>.' The Americans evidently hoped that the wishes of the smaller **Pacific** powers would be sifted in **London**, and some coherent and preferably practicable suggestions submitted to Washington. The Americans, with whom lay power and responsibility in the **Pacific**, would thus have supreme control, consulting with Churchill and a few British experts, but without any suggestion that action must be preceded by a negotiated agreement among half-a-dozen technically independent powers.

The discussions on this problem showed how far New Zealand policy had moved in the three war years. On 6 February Walter Nash, now Minister at **Washington**, though still a member of the New Zealand cabinet, summed up the Dominion's criticisms of a Far Eastern or Pacific Council in **London**. The proposal, he wrote, will 'lead to the formation of a British Commonwealth or sectarian point of view, which will then have to be reconciled from a considerable distance with another sectarian point of view in **Washington**'. His argument was for a council at **Washington** to direct the **Pacific** war, and he urged that New Zealand should continue to press for this 'not only for our own sakes but for the sake of the common cause. Clinging to pre-war policies and exaggerating present loyalties will not help towards our objective—the winning of the war—and neither policies nor loyalties will matter much if we lose.' His cable ended, 'Sir John Dill has just advised me over the telephone that Churchill has announced the setting-up of the Far Eastern Council in **London**, and I presume we will not say much publicly at present; but it does not appear to me that we can effectively carry on a successful **Pacific** campaign other than through **Washington** as suggested.'

New Zealand could do nothing but accept the London Council and Fraser did not press a suggestion from Nash that the

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<sup>1</sup> The American-British-Dutch-Australian defence area, which was formally placed under the command of General Wavell in December 1941, and which disintegrated with the Japanese

victories of the following February.

<sup>2</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 2 Feb 1942.

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Australian, New Zealand and Dutch ministers be summoned in an advisory capacity to all meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. 'I should be sorry,' he replied, 'at this stage ... to create any impression at all that we were perhaps trying to by-pass the channels agreed upon, however cumbersome we believe those channels to be <sup>1</sup>.' It was decided to move Nash to **London**, and in the meantime Jordan attended meetings of the Council there which began on 10 February. The whole problem was, however, soon transformed by Japanese victories, and the blotting out of the ABDA command. **Singapore** fell on 15 February, **Rangoon** on 7 March, and resistance in the Dutch East Indies ended the day after. The Anzac area now became the forward zone and plans were discussed for its extension and reorganisation. **Australia** suggested that an **Anzac Council** be set up in **Washington** to provide a voice for **Australia** and New Zealand on operations in this area. <sup>2</sup> Not without qualms, New Zealand supported the proposal. <sup>3</sup> However, Roosevelt had been taking stock of the consequences of the disappearance of the ABDA area and now proposed a division of responsibility, with **America** primarily responsible for the **Pacific** and **Britain** for the **Indian Ocean** area. In the new situation a Pacific Council in **London** and not in **Washington** became, presumably, too glaring an anomaly, and a Pacific Council was set up in **Washington** to discuss strategic and supply problems. It was understood that the London Council would deal with political matters.

Both of the councils met fairly regularly until the latter part of 1943. The Washington Council was the better known, but from the nature of the case it seems very doubtful if what was said at either of them played much part in influencing the higher direction of the war. According to a member of one of the diplomatic missions, 'The meetings of the Council never amounted to much anyway; usually all we did was

to listen to Mr Roosevelt discuss what had been going on in the **Pacific** and we generally already knew what had been told us through earlier talks with the military staffs <sup>4</sup>.' The two councils, with their comparatively regular meetings, became useful clearing-houses for information and gave opportunities for airing grievances. <sup>5</sup> There was no fulfilment of the naive hope that some institution such as a Pacific Council in **Washington** would give to small countries a more effective voice there than they already possessed through diplomatic and military representation. <sup>6</sup> The issue,

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<sup>1</sup> PM to Nash, 19 Feb 1942.

<sup>2</sup> PM Aust. to PM NZ, 1 and 5 Mar 1942.

<sup>3</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 6 Mar 1942.

<sup>4</sup> *Dominion*, 19 Dec 1944.

<sup>5</sup> McNeill, p. 156.

<sup>6</sup> Brigadier A. B. Williams became New Zealand Army representative in the British Joint Staff Mission in February 1942.—Gillespie, pp. 30, 60.

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however, provided the clearest illustration of New Zealand's sense, in the critical months of 1942, that her immediate destiny was being decided not in **London** but in Washington.

New Zealand was naturally gratified to be told in March 1942 that a Pacific Council was to be set up in **Washington**, but another detail of the reorganisation made in the same month was much less welcome to her. It was decided to divide the **Pacific** into the Southwest Pacific area stretching from **Australia** northward to the **Philippines**, and under the command of General MacArthur, and the Pacific Ocean area under

**Admiral Nimitz, Commander of the United States Pacific Fleet. The Pacific Ocean area was subdivided into three, and it was in the southern of these areas that New Zealand and the island groups to the north of her were included. Both New Zealand and Australia were most dissatisfied at this separation. Nevertheless, plans for the garrisoning of the South Pacific were promptly completed in Washington and at the end of March Nash reported from Washington that some of the forces destined there had already been despatched. He concluded that there was no hope of the arrangement being altered, and suggested that 'To insist now that the naval plans for New Zealand and the Islands and contemplated naval operations should be placed under the control of MacArthur would ... extend the delays and differences which we have been trying to clear up <sup>1</sup>.' Wellington agreed that the best course was to register a protest, but to accept the arrangement and do all possible to make it work. <sup>2</sup>**

**This incident showed clearly where lay the lines of authority and responsibility in the Pacific area. When America entered the war, Roosevelt and Churchill reached a broad understanding that the strategic direction of the war as a whole (except, of course, operations in Russia) would be in the hands of the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee, sitting in Washington. This comprised the American Chiefs of Staff, together with three senior officers who acted under instructions from the British Chiefs of Staff. Any differences of opinion would be adjusted by personal agreement between President and Prime Minister. <sup>3</sup> Under this general authority, however, blocks of responsibility were assigned to other bodies; and control over the Pacific, including the commands of both MacArthur and Nimitz, was placed directly in the hands of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff. <sup>4</sup> Technically the Joint Chiefs of Staff dealt with service matters only; yet their decisions inevitably had great political importance and were partly at least guided by**

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to PM, 27 Mar 1942.

<sup>2</sup> PM NZ to Nash, 28 Mar 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill to House of Commons, 27 Jan 1942.

<sup>4</sup> McNeill, p. 157.

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political considerations. Accordingly, when **Australia** and New Zealand wished to influence the plans which concerned them so closely, they had to do so in one of two ways: at the very highest level, through Churchill or direct to Roosevelt; and on the professional level, through military liaison with the Chiefs of Staff. Neither channel was particularly easy, and neither gave much hope of that process of consultation and conference which was in principle the life blood of the British Commonwealth. Moreover, nothing which could be said by the Dominions was likely to shake the long-established principle of Anglo-American strategy—'beat **Germany** first'. Yet American control, and American insistence that victory in the **Atlantic** took precedence, did not leave them, in Churchill's phrase, forgotten or 'comfortless in your hour of peril', or dependent on purely military calculations. <sup>1</sup> In the darkest days of March 1942 there was apparently serious talk of abandoning **Australia** and New Zealand to the enemy. In Admiral King's phrase, however, 'We cannot in honor let **Australia** and New Zealand down. They are our brothers, and we must not allow them to be overrun by **Japan**.' Roosevelt agreed. <sup>2</sup> The crisis, if indeed the plan were taken seriously, passed.

Whatever New Zealand's hopes of ultimate succour, the situation in the early months of 1942 was frightening enough. Having long underestimated **Japan**'s striking power, the experts now tended to exaggerate it. <sup>3</sup> Moreover, there were grounds for expecting a strong thrust southwards: on 8 January 1942, for instance, the American authorities told New Zealand that an attack on **Fiji** by a division and four aircraft-carriers could be expected at any time after 10 January. <sup>4</sup> In February the **New Zealand Government** argued strongly that the

Japanese, having conquered the Netherlands Indies, were more likely to attack **Australia** than **India**. **Australia** was after all the obvious base for an Allied counter-attack; 'it seems to follow that New Zealand must become a base also, and, especially having regard to the vulnerability of Australian bases, it may well become the main base.' It was essential therefore to hold both New Zealand, whose relative isolation made it potentially a most secure base, and **Fiji**, which was 'an essential link on the line of air communication and a potential naval base.' 'If they both fall, the prospect of adequately conducting from the **United States** effective operations in the Mid- and South West Pacific areas seems to us to become exceedingly thin <sup>5</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. statement of necessity for instant action to save **Hawaii**, **Fiji**, New Zealand and **New Caledonia**.—Eisenhower to Marshall, 14 Dec 1941. Quoted Munro, *Foreign Affairs*, July 1953, p. 635.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, *US Naval Operations*, Vol. IV, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> Gillespie, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 12 Jan 1942; Gillespie, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 17 Feb 1942.

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Thinking thus, the **New Zealand Government** was alarmed to find that military opinion in **London** still apparently expected that the next Japanese move would be west towards **India** and north towards **Burma**. <sup>1</sup> It would follow that any attack on New Zealand would be on a small scale, say by a brigade group. Realisation of the implications of these calculations stung the **New Zealand Government** to vehement protest. 'Candidly I must tell you,' cabled Fraser to Churchill on 28 February, 'that my colleagues and I are appalled by this attempt to think in terms of the past, and if this line of thought is persisted in we must brace ourselves to meet the fate of **Malaya**, and with infinitely less reason or



**excuse.’ He asked that if this calculation went forward ‘it be accompanied by our very strongest protest’ and a vigorous statement of New Zealand's contrary views. Churchill replied soothingly to this outburst; indeed, the report against which New Zealand had reacted was based on preliminary discussions which he said did not represent the views of the British Chiefs of Staff. In practice, however, the three large measures for New Zealand security which he had in mind amounted to his hopes of persuading **America** to send adequate naval strength to the Anzac area, to reinforce **Fiji** and **New Caledonia**, and to offer troops to New Zealand in compensation for the absence of her Expeditionary Force in the **Middle East**.<sup>2</sup>**

**At this stage New Zealand was pressing primarily for aircraft and for equipment for the army. It was recognised that the ‘most effective insurance against invasion is that given by naval forces, which should with adequate air support intercept any enemy expedition before it reaches New Zealand<sup>3</sup>.’ Since it was, to say the least, uncertain whether the naval forces available would be adequate, every possible effort was being made to build up the air and land forces in New Zealand. It was painfully clear, however, that New Zealand was utterly dependent on her overseas friends for equipment. Quite apart from her basic industrial weakness, the deliberate policy in the early days of the war had been to rely on overseas supplies. Further, no conceivable disposition of manpower could find, even untrained, more than half the men judged necessary for the local defence of New Zealand.**

**Similar considerations, even more anxiously weighed, were valid in **Australia**. In both dominions, therefore, the problem immediately arose of the disposition of their expeditionary forces in northern **Africa**. This was a matter not only for the two dominions but for the overall strategy of the war. As early as February 1941 Churchill had pointed out to Roosevelt that Japanese raids would cause**

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<sup>1</sup> Liaison Officer, **London**, to CGS, Wgtn, 25 Feb 1942.



<sup>2</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 4 Mar 1942.

<sup>3</sup> PM NZ to Nash, 14 Feb 1942.

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‘deep anxiety in those Dominions, which have sent all their best trained fighting men to the **Middle East**’, and would nullify the efforts that had been made to create armies in that area; while any threat of major invasion would have to be met by withdrawing the fleet from the **Middle East**, with disastrous military consequences. <sup>1</sup> The crisis which actually arose in 1942 had the quality that Churchill had foreseen and feared. Japanese warships were indeed not raiding the Dominions’ coasts: but the barrier which was to have given security against them had fallen almost overnight, and in circumstances which led many to question the wisdom of British leadership in the past. The logic of the position, as seen by Churchill and Roosevelt, was clear. The chances of direct attack on either dominion remained small. Dominion troops of high fighting quality were established in the critical **Middle East** theatre. To transport them home would be to establish them, at vast cost in shipping space, in an area where their value in the total war effort would be much less, and where they would fight under conditions totally different from those for which they had been trained. It would be more logical, more economical of men and materials and energy, to protect **Australia** and New Zealand with American naval forces and by American troops carried across the relatively safe waters of the **Pacific**.

Yet there was another logic, powerfully felt by the Australian Government, with which New Zealand was closely in touch. This argued that a country’s proper defenders were its own citizens, that the realities of **Pacific** strategy were best judged by those who bore the immediate risks of failure, and that neither **London** nor **Washington** had calculated soundly or judged penetratingly on the issues raised by Japanese aggression. A mixture of reason and emotion accordingly laid great stress on the fact that **Australia**’s best troops were serving in the **Middle East** while their home country was a potential battlefield and liable to

invasion by a longfeared enemy. Moreover, in a sharp difference of opinion in the second half of 1941 over the defence of **Tobruk**, successive Australian governments had insisted on their own judgment in the use of Australians against the strongest military arguments and political pressure that Churchill could bring to bear. The displacement during this crisis of Menzies by the Labour leader Curtin as Prime Minister of **Australia** increased, for the time being at least, the disposition of the Australian Government to stand independently of British leadership. <sup>2</sup> As was to be expected, therefore, the Australians asked, and the British reluctantly agreed, that their

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill to Roosevelt, 15 Feb 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, Vol. III; Hasluck, pp. 616 ff; McNeill, p. 152.

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troops should return from the **Middle East** as promptly as possible. Two divisions were at sea, off the coasts of **India**, when **Singapore** fell, and an over-hasty suggestion that one of them should be used in **Burma** brought a further conflict of opinion between the British and Australian governments, and a further firm Australian refusal. <sup>1</sup>

The sentiments which animated the Australians were felt in New Zealand too. There had long been a strong current of opinion that too much attention was being paid to the European theatre, and not enough to the **Pacific** and to home defence. With an obviously menacing situation, the natural feeling, both in the Dominion and among the troops, was bluntly expressed by **Freyberg**—‘if New Zealand is attacked, our place should be at home.’ Furthermore, the political consideration was soon to be added: that New Zealand, as a **Pacific** country, should have a voice in the decision of **Pacific** politics, and that the best way to earn this right was by hard fighting in **Pacific** warfare. These arguments were raised in the community—and in Parliament—backed by reports, mainly from the **United States**, that large forces were held inactive in **Britain** while troops from the Dominions were used mercilessly in North

Africa.<sup>2</sup> Yet New Zealand characteristically gave great weight to Churchill's solid and eloquent arguments, based on the general interest. He had yielded to Australian pressure, and the bulk of their troops were on the way home. To supply shipping to bring the New Zealand Division to the **Pacific**, and then replacements to the **Middle East**, would be a further immense drain on resources, and would gravely weaken the Commonwealth's forces in a still vital area. Accordingly, on 5 March Churchill proposed to Roosevelt that an American division should come to New Zealand on the express condition that the NZEF remained in Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Five days later he enthusiastically reported the President's approval. 'You have never asked for the withdrawal of your division, and we have admired the constancy of spirit and devotion to the cause which has animated your government and people. All the more do I feel that this promised aid from the **United States** will be gratifying<sup>4</sup>.'

The offer was accepted, but with some unhappiness. Fraser did not ask for the return of the Division, but he pointed out that there would be awkwardness when it became known that Australian troops were being returned to their homeland.<sup>5</sup> He reported the 'feeling which I am told is becoming marked in the Division, that

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<sup>1</sup> McNeill, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Documents, II, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, Vol. IV, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> SSSA to PM, 10 Mar 1942.

<sup>5</sup> On 8 April the Director of Publicity, in a memorandum to editors, asked them to avoid placing undue emphasis upon this news.

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their proper place when their own country is in danger is in the

**Pacific theatre’; and he added, ‘I must say that we have a lot of sympathy with that point of view, which may well be the cause of grave embarrassment and that before long.’ Moreover, the Government did not at present see the possibility of reinforcing the Division which, with its training and battle experience, ‘would unquestionably be of infinitely greater value to us in this theatre than any American division can be until it has had equal experience.’ Nor was cabinet satisfied with the dates at which the American troops were to arrive or the size of force that was to be provided. An appreciation prepared by the Chief of the New Zealand General Staff had given the land force required for the defence of New Zealand as six divisions. The American division plus what New Zealand could provide for itself would still leave the country two divisions short of this figure. <sup>1</sup>**

**Overseas opinion thought New Zealand's estimate of her own needs was somewhat high. The Americans thought four divisions would be fair enough. <sup>2</sup> The British Chiefs of Staff put the figure somewhat lower, in a careful calculation at the end of March. They argued that so long as **New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa** were held, a Japanese invasion of New Zealand would be ‘extremely difficult if not impracticable.’ If the island groups were lost, invasion would become ‘much more possible’ though still unlikely. If the Japanese should decide to invade New Zealand they could use some ten to eleven divisions, together with a large naval force including five aircraft-carriers (240 aircraft). However, the seizure of a base would be a necessary preliminary to a full-scale invasion, for which operation the Japanese might use one or two divisions. It would be essential to repel this initial attack since ‘to provide sufficient land forces to prevent Japanese occupation once they had established a base in New Zealand would be far beyond the shipping resources of Allied Powers.’ Accordingly the British Chiefs of Staff thought that New Zealand's land forces should stand at two or three divisions. <sup>3</sup>**

**This detailed and cogently argued estimate had behind it the principle expressed by Churchill on 15 March: ‘Our great aim must be to regain even a partial initiative, which will make the enemy fearful of**

every place he holds, instead of our trying to be safe everywhere, for that is utterly impossible', <sup>4</sup> and if it had been taken at its face value no troops at all need have been sent to New Zealand. The New Zealand Government was naturally ill-content with this analysis. It had grave doubts about the 'appreciations' by

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<sup>1</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 15 Mar 1942.

<sup>2</sup> Nash to PM, 29 Apr 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Liaison Officer, **London**, to CGS, Wgtn, 28 Mar 1942.

<sup>4</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 15 Mar 1942.

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overseas military experts, and expressed them about this time with only less heat than did the Australians. Its judgment on the views now expressed by the British Chiefs of Staff was that they had adequately visualised the dangers confronting New Zealand but had failed 'to carry the matter to its logical and reasonable conclusion, inasmuch as they set forth defence requirements that cannot be reconciled either with the possible scale of attack or the needs of future offensive operations <sup>1</sup>.' Yet it could do no other than adopt its customary realistic attitude. Having expressed an individual and cogent judgment, and being willing at appropriate times to urge that decisions be reviewed, New Zealand accepted the inevitable and strove to operate effectively the policy which had in the end been adopted. In March 1942 this meant keeping the NZEF in the **Middle East**, a decision which was from time to time reviewed, but which inescapably laid on New Zealand a double role for the rest of the war. She maintained a high proportion of her manpower in the **Middle East**, and yet strove to play her part politically, economically, and militarily in the expanding field of **Pacific** warfare.

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<sup>1</sup> PM NZ to Nash, 31 Mar 1942.



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 17 – PYRRHIC VICTORY



## CHAPTER 17

### *Pyrrhic Victory*

**THE sharp fear of Japanese attack; the prolonged strain of a two-front war whose demands could not possibly be met; the need for adjustment to policies of two great overseas allies instead of one; and the impact on the community of a hundred thousand American visitors: these things necessarily had profound effects on New Zealand life.**

**Their reaction on party politics was indeed somewhat unexpectedly delayed. In December and January the Opposition fought by-election campaigns with full vigour as the Japanese pushed their way through **Malaya** and the **Philippines**. On 19 January S. G. Holland, Leader of the Opposition, said that in his tour he had found growing discontent and frustration among the people, and that he was preparing a comprehensive memorandum setting out what was wrong. It was a document which appeared to have considerable relevance to party warfare, and **Holland** agreed to postpone publication for a few days while those immediately concerned studied it. It was discussed by the House of Representatives in secret session, and in the end War Cabinet seems to have persuaded the Leader of the Opposition that publication would not be in the public interest. When the House resumed open session there was as usual plain speech, but no suggestion that constructive work had been done to bring the parties closer together. Indeed, the most significant indication of political trends was a strong statement by the Prime Minister, emphasising his disagreement with some of his followers in the Labour movement in dealing with an urgent current issue.**

**The problem was that of industrial trouble in wartime. In Mr Holland's by-election campaigning in January, the core of his criticism of the Government was its alleged weakness in dealing with strikes, and on two occasions later in the year the same issue became of crucial importance. The reasons for this were plain. It is true that so far during the war years New Zealand's record did not compare badly with that of other Commonwealth countries—the number of days lost in strikes per**

thousand persons engaged in mining, industry and transport was much less than in **Australia**, less than in **Canada**, and only slightly more than in Great Britain.

Yet a real economic problem lay in the fact that losses were concentrated in certain key portions of the industrial system—in mining, waterside work and meat-freezing. For instance in 1942, which was to be an exceptionally bad year, nearly one week's work per miner was to be lost through strikes. <sup>1</sup>

The importance of industrial trouble, however, cannot be estimated in purely economic terms. Every strike seemed to present a glaring contrast between the actions of strikers who, to a greater or less extent, were inflicting loss on the community in pursuit of sectional advantage, and those of the servicemen who had volunteered or been conscripted into risking their lives for the common interest. Naturally enough this produced a bitterness which was strongest in those groups who did not themselves have a tradition of strike action or any need for it. In many cases their members drove a hard bargain with the community for their own services; yet there was in the strike an obvious element of coercion which gave it an especial quality as an irritant. Consequently, the National Party and the press found somewhat the same use for the strikers in 1939–45 as the Labour Party had for the war-profiteer in 1914–18. In each case the Government's critics could accuse it of tolerating the activities of a figure whose anti-social character and party affiliations were hardly debateable.

At the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, with a Japanese invasion actually to be feared, strikes of more or less importance continued. The problem of maintaining industrial discipline, accordingly, became worse than embarrassing for the Government, and when Parliament reassembled in March it drew from the Prime Minister a startling and important personal statement. A strike was in progress at the Westfield freezing works over the status of two rival local unions. The strikers had disregarded instructions from the Government—as workers in an essential industry—to resume work, their union had been

deregistered, the Prime Minister had appealed for volunteer labour,<sup>2</sup> and prosecutions had been brought against the strikers. There were signs that the Westfield men had a considerable measure of support from other unions in **Auckland**, and it seemed as if a crisis might be at hand in the relations between the Government and the industrial unions. While Fraser was replying to Opposition appeals for a fuller mobilisation of national resources for the war, he said that he had just been informed that some of the Westfield strikers had been sent to prison. While he did not want, he said, to see men punished, he 'would sooner punish any number of men than betray the country at the present

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<sup>1</sup> Hare, *Industrial Relations in New Zealand*, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, p. 60.

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moment.... If the Government cannot take strong enough action by the ordinary process of the Civil law, then other methods may have to be contemplated....' More than that, if he could not get better support from the workers, his duty would be clear-'to step down altogether.' He would not 'step out and endeavour to form a Government behind the backs or opposed to the wishes of those with whom I have been associated. I have helped to build up the Labour party of this country, and I will stand by the Labour party of this country, but I will not lead any party if it is going to mean a betrayal of the country.... If I am to remain, whatever steps have to be taken will be taken with the support and the consent of the party to which I belong, or else my resignation will go in to the Governor-General <sup>1</sup>.'

Underlying the Prime Minister's outburst was both his exasperation at the irresponsibility of some trade unionists and also his personal conviction, dating at least from 1940, that 'national unity' required the further association of non-Labour groups with the administration. It was greeted by **Holland** as 'the best and strongest thing that has been said for a very long time <sup>2</sup>'; on the other hand. it left Fraser's followers still

unconvinced of the desirability of cooperation with the Opposition, even if they saw the need to give effective (though critical) support to the Government. The immediate occasion—the Westfield strike—passed within a week. Work was resumed, the cases of the 213 sentenced strikers were re-heard, and the men were ordered to come up for sentence if called within a year.<sup>3</sup> But the strike and Fraser's reaction to it overshadowed the annual conferences of both the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party.

At the first of these conferences the Government was very generally criticised for not taking a sufficiently strong line with the employers. Webb in reply told the delegates that 'If you go along the way your freezing workers are going up there, you are full steam ahead for a wreck not only of yourselves, but of the Government too...<sup>4</sup>.' At the Labour Party conference the possibility of a two-party government was directly considered and there appeared an open disagreement between the Prime Minister and the rest of the party. The conference unanimously declared its opposition to the proposal and recommended that the party remain prepared for a general election. Fraser said that 'he realised that his personal views were out of line with the opinion of the Parliamentary Party and with those of his colleagues in Cabinet',

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 28 Mar 1942.

<sup>4</sup> *Standard*, 9 Apr 1942.

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and went on to explain what he would do if he felt he could no longer carry on as prime minister of a purely Labour government because 'sections of the people were not co-operating in the national war effort'. He would first consult cabinet, caucus and the national

**executive of the party; if no solution could be found he would go to the Governor-General, tender his resignation as prime minister 'and recommend to him that he call upon the leader of the majority party to take my place. The fact that the election had been postponed would, no doubt, play a part in subsequent events <sup>1</sup>.'**

**This was an astute move. Fraser confronted his colleagues with an awkward alternative; to accept a broadening of the administration, should he consider it necessary, or to face an election under unfavourable circumstances. The pressure on them would clearly be great. Fraser could, indeed, hardly hope to induce them to consent to a division of domestic cabinet portfolios in a coalition government formed with the National Party. However, if the Nationalists could be induced to agree to some proposal falling short of this, then Fraser was in a strong position to persuade his own party to go halfway to meet them. At the beginning of April 1942 the state of public controversy showed little likelihood that the new and uncompromising leadership of the National Party would be prepared to consent to any such half-measures. Nevertheless, negotiations were actually in progress which in the end enabled Fraser to exert much the same sort of pressure on the Nationalists as he had already brought to bear on his own party.**

**These negotiations seem to have begun with a meeting between Fraser and the Hon. W. Perry, President of the New Zealand Returned Services Association, with other members of the executive of that body. Perry later explained that the NZRSA had been anxious since May 1941 to do something which would help in establishing a greater measure of national unity, and that on this occasion Fraser urged it to formulate some concrete proposals. On 23 March 1942 the NZRSA executive produced a manifesto in fairly general terms but urging 'The reorganisation and strengthening of the present War Cabinet on a truly national basis with the inclusion of men from outside Parliament, thus creating a National War Cabinet, with full executive powers to prosecute a total war effort in New Zealand.' It also proposed 'The elimination of party recriminations for the duration of the war both inside and outside**

**Parliament.’ This manifesto was submitted to NZRSA branches and approved by a ‘great majority’ of them. Perry explained when the plan was made public that what was intended by the War Cabinet**

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<sup>1</sup> *Standard*, 16 Apr 1942.

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**proposal was that the existing War Cabinet should resign and the Prime Minister should appoint a new one ‘unfettered by party political considerations and on a truly national basis.’ The reference to the elimination of party recrimination meant that as long as a really national War Cabinet faithfully performed the task for which it was set up an election would be unnecessary. As transmitted to **Holland**, the plan apparently provided for the inclusion in the National Government of representatives of manufacturers, dairy farmers, workers and other interests. <sup>1</sup>**

**Private negotiations followed, in which, as might have been expected, the new proposals were accepted by the Labour Party and rejected by the Nationalists. Holland pointed out that they continued the division between the domestic and war cabinets and involved the National Party approving in advance the Prime Minister's appointments to the latter. He felt also that the appointment to ministerial office of men from outside Parliament was constitutionally a dangerous departure —‘We have already had far too much domination of Parliament by outside interests <sup>2</sup>.’**

**A censorship request to the press to withhold comment was withdrawn on **Holland**'s request, <sup>3</sup> and on 15 May the proposals and the attitude towards them of the political parties were made public. A lively if unfruitful discussion on the matter ensued. However, on 29 May direct talks between the party leaders began, and on 24 June the caucuses of both parties agreed on yet another addition to the structure of New Zealand's wartime government. The war effort was to be the responsibility of a War Administration of seven Government members (Fraser, Jones, Sullivan, Semple, Paikea, McLagan, Nordmeyer) and six**

Opposition ( **Holland**, Coates, Hamilton, Polson, Bodkin, Broadfoot). Each of these held some portfolio relative to the direction of the war, <sup>4</sup> but with the exception of Semple, who relinquished National Service to Broad-foot, the existing members of the domestic cabinet retained their portfolios. There were accordingly some rather ingenious creations, and apparent overlapping in function. Jones, for instance, remained Minister of Defence while Coates became Minister of Armed Forces and War Co-ordination and was given charge of New Zealand's military effort at home and in the South Pacific. The War Cabinet (which **Holland** joined and of which he became deputy chairman) was to act as the 'executive' of the War Administration in matters not dealt with by the full body.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Perry in *Evening Post*, 16 May 1942; **Holland** in *Dominion*, 7 Jul 1942; *Round Table*, September 1942, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 18 May 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Director of Publicity to editors, 11 May 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Full details were given in *Evening Post*, 1 Jul 1942.

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It was also announced that a Bill was to be introduced extending the life of Parliament 'for the period of the war and for a period after the war not exceeding twelve months <sup>1</sup>.' There were signs of considerable public uneasiness at this proposal, mainly among conservatives, though the Auckland Trades Council also expressed its misgivings. <sup>2</sup> In deference to such criticisms and to feeling within Parliament itself, a provision was inserted in the Prolongation of Parliament Act for a vote of the House to be taken on the question each year.

The new arrangement meant, in essence, that the Opposition representatives got portfolios while the members of the Government kept theirs: in spite of his earlier objections, **Holland** agreed to the continuance of the existing domestic cabinet. Justifying his action to a



critical National Party conference a month later, he said that the arrangement was 'not ideal, but he thought, in common British fairness, that it was entitled to a fair trial. <sup>3</sup>' He had, he said, attempted a rapid survey of opinion in New Zealand and found no feeling in favour of a general election in 1942. Moreover, though it was not at the time publicly known, New Zealand troops were being moved from **Syria** to help check Rommel's advance in Egypt. In such a situation, and when the National Party had already rejected a plan sponsored by the NZRSA, there was a strong inducement to its leaders to avoid the odium of precipitating a renewal of party warfare.

The new arrangement looked, on the face of it, unbearably clumsy, and as a constitutional device even more anomalous than its predecessor. Yet it was defended with vigorous cogency by men so normally divergent as the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. It was futile to complain, said Fraser, that it was not a national government. Everyone knew that a national government was impossible. The only possible course was to make the best arrangement possible, and then make sure that it worked. 'Anything will work—even an inefficient organisation—if the people concerned put their hearts and their souls into the job. <sup>4</sup>' **Holland** used terms not so very different in answer to critics within his own party, and appealed successfully for support in operating 'the best arrangement that was possible in the circumstances. <sup>5</sup>' Moreover, he gave to the Prime Minister an assurance of co-operation on the very point which in the early phase of the war had most bedevilled relations between the parties. 'One of the first things which the

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 24 Jun 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Jul 1942

<sup>3</sup> *Christchurch Press*, 24 Jul 1942.



<sup>4</sup> NZPD, Vol. 261, p. 373; *Evening Post*, 1 Jul 1942.

<sup>5</sup> *Press*, 24 Jul 1942.

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Leader of the Opposition said when he approached me on this matter,' Fraser told Parliament, 'was that there was no desire of the party to which he belonged to interfere with the social legislation or its administration by the Government, adding that that had been the decision of the country in the past, and it should continue. <sup>1</sup>' As a conservative observer remarked: 'one wonders what effect such an assurance, given earlier, might have had upon the course of events since the outbreak of the war. <sup>2</sup>' As it was, the arrangement amounted, as **Holland** said, to 'a political revolution <sup>3</sup>'; and it was launched with good hopes, if not with great expectations.

The War Administration lasted three months, during which time it had a fair claim to have represented successfully a united national will to fight. So far as the work of government and administration was concerned, this seems to have proceeded effectively, in spite of the apparent clumsiness of the institution; at a time when recriminations were hot, Polson and Bodkin went out of their way to emphasise the smoothness of the co-operation between members of the two parties. <sup>4</sup> In the inner circle of the War Cabinet, however, there seems to have been friction from the first between **Holland** and its older members. After he had been Minister of War Expenditure for a fortnight **Holland** decided that something further should be done to control expenditure from the War Expenses Account, which, for security reasons, was exempt from parliamentary supervision. Accordingly, he proposed to Fraser before the latter left for the **United States** on 13 August that a committee should be set up of two MPs and two persons from outside Parliament to examine this expenditure. Fraser was apparently agreeable to this proposal, but did not give final approval to **Holland**'s statement setting out the reasons for it and implying, in Fraser's view, criticism of the Commissioner of Defence Construction <sup>5</sup>. He said that the matter would have to be

considered by Sullivan as acting Prime Minister. Sullivan does not seem to have objected to the draft when **Holland** discussed it with him and **Holland** handed it to the press. On 4 September, however, publication was held up and the matter referred to War Cabinet on the authority of the Director of Publicity, who maintained that the terms used went beyond what was necessary and might damage public morale by implied criticism of the War Cabinet's past handling of financial matters. This view was supported by Sullivan and other members of War Cabinet. No

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, p. 568.

<sup>2</sup> *Round Table*, September 1942, p. 527.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, pp. 695 and 704.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 639. Sir James Fletcher had been appointed Commissioner of Defence Construction in March 1942.

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agreement could be reached and **Holland** agreed to the matter being held over until Fraser's return from the **United States**. <sup>1</sup>

By that time, however, this tiresome matter was overshadowed by graver causes of disagreement arising from a crisis in the vexed field of industrial relations; for a stoppage ostensibly originating in a very minor dispute at the **Huntly** mines threatened to paralyse the industrial activity of the whole of the **North Island**. Both the industrial conflict and its associated political crisis were complex, and in some important incidents the facts were hotly disputed. Yet the general course of events at this turning point in New Zealand's wartime politics was clear. Faced with industrial chaos, Labour ministers launched at the strikers threats of legal action and bitter reproaches. They had, said Semple, 'declared civil war on the civilian community <sup>2</sup>.' They had been 'led by a few

wreckers,' said Webb, 'and have declared war on the state. Their challenge will be accepted <sup>3</sup>.' Sullivan, then acting Prime Minister, spoke of strong steps to be taken, and said that 'the people will prefer to endure and suffer if need be, rather than surrender to either the internal or external aggressor, each of whom equally threatens the security of the nation <sup>4</sup>.' War Cabinet authorised legal proceedings, and **Holland**, its deputy chairman as well as Leader of the Opposition, stated that 'this is a time for the strongest action.' 'There can be no thought of any arrangement that interferes with the processes of the law by which those who break it are punished,' he said, and added that 'the question of who is to rule this country must be settled once and for all <sup>5</sup>.'

Mr W. A. Bodkin, one of **Holland's** senior colleagues, later disclosed that **Holland** had consulted him on this statement and that at first he had urged him not to make it. 'I said that the Government was mishandling the whole business and getting into an impossible position which it could not sustain.' **Holland** had replied that 'he had asked each member of the War Cabinet whether he really meant that the law must take its course. Each one said that he stood for enforcement of the law, and that the matter had gone too far to do otherwise....' Could the Opposition refrain from coming out in support of the Government? In these circumstances Bodkin had 'with grave misgivings' agreed that **Holland's** only course was to make the statement 'as the acting-Prime Minister had virtually asked for it <sup>6</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, pp. 635ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 15 Sep 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *Auckland Star*, 9 Sep 1942.

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Post*, 15 Sep 1942.

<sup>5</sup> *Dominion*, 16 Sep 1942.

A few days later a group of recalcitrant strikers were sentenced to a month's imprisonment, and deadlock seemed to be complete. At this moment Fraser returned from the **United States**, and a further attempt at negotiation began. Over the weekend, and before the sentences had been enforced, the strikers got wind of a proposal, which had originated before Fraser's return, that the mines should be taken over by the State for the duration of the war, and on this understanding agreed to go back to work. On 21 September Fraser proposed to a joint meeting of the War Administration and domestic cabinet that the mines should be taken over and the sentences on the miners suspended on condition that they dug coal diligently and took part in no more strikes. **Holland** alone was opposed and the plan was adopted. The mines were taken under state control; the miners' sentences were conditionally suspended and they returned promptly to work; and the original dispute went to the **National Disputes Committee**, which incidentally pronounced the men to have been wrong. Government policy, said the Prime Minister, had been successful in preventing 'an industrial catastrophe of great magnitude which would have directly and disastrously affected our war effort.... The position now is,' he claimed, 'that the law is upheld and coal production, so vital to the war effort, has been fully resumed <sup>1</sup>.'

**Holland** strongly dissociated himself from the policy adopted, and of the remaining five National members of the War Administration, three in the end stood with him, including two who had voted with the majority on 21 September. The resulting situation was discussed at a National Party caucus on 29 September, and it was decided to withdraw the party's representatives from the War Cabinet and the War Administration. Announcing this decision **Holland** said that 'When a state neglects to enforce its own laws it sows the seeds of anarchy. When it gives law-breakers more than they broke the law to get, it means an end to constitutional government.... the taking over of the mines by the State at the dictates of strikers, creates a precedent which

may easily involve the country in complete economic chaos.’ The National members, said **Holland**, must make ‘the most emphatic protest within our power’; and if the Prime Minister thought they had done wrong, ‘an election as soon as the war situation permits would appear to be the best solution.’ The Prime Minister replied sharply. He had no difficulty in showing that previous New Zealand governments had remitted sentences on strikers who had resumed work, and not merely suspended them conditionally as in the present case <sup>2</sup>. ‘Apparently,’

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 30 Sep 1942; *Round Table*, December 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Dominion*, 1 and 2 Oct 1942.

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he said, ‘Mr Holland and his colleagues are of the opinion that the Government should have aimed not at having the mines restarted and our war effort and industry generally kept going, but at placing the 180 miners who were sentenced, and the 900 or 1000 others who were on strike as well, in jail where they would be actually prevented from producing the necessary coal <sup>1</sup>.’

At the beginning of October the six National Party members duly resigned from the War Administration, but Coates and Hamilton, who had been members of the War Cabinet since its inception, immediately accepted Fraser's invitation to rejoin it as individuals. Hamilton served there till the end of the war, and Coates till his death in 1943; he was succeeded by William Perry, who as President of the NZRSA had initiated the negotiations leading to the War Administration. On rejoining the War Cabinet Coates and Hamilton issued a statement trenchantly criticising the policy followed by the majority of their party. The strikers' behaviour, however reprehensible, did not in their view justify the extreme step adopted: the right answer to an industrial strike was not a political strike. **Holland's** demand for a general election, if agreed to, would transform a caucus issue into an election issue, and disrupt political unity when the enemy was at the gates. ‘Manoeuvring for party

advantage by any section in these critical hours' must hamper the war effort. For themselves, they had decided 'that our duty to the country is more important than our duty to party. Our plain duty ... is to accept the Prime Minister's request, remain at our posts, and continue to render what service we can during our country's peril <sup>2</sup>.' Few others spoke so firmly against the party's leadership, yet there was clearly a substantial minority in the members which felt uneasy as to what had been done. A number of opposition newspapers approved of the stand taken by Coates and Hamilton; and when Parliament met on 14 October two other Opposition members voted with them after a confidence motion had been furiously debated <sup>3</sup>.

Thus broke down the last serious effort to create something like a coalition government; for three months, indeed, a coalition had been virtually achieved, for an administration ostensibly confined to the war effort was in fact dealing with most important issues. <sup>4</sup> With its collapse, said Fraser dramatically, 'The basis of unity in the country has been destroyed—irretrievably destroyed—because there can be no trust between the two parties now <sup>5</sup>.' The War Administration had been very largely his own creation, the result

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 1 Oct 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 Oct 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, pp. 717-18.

<sup>4</sup> *Round Table*, December 1942, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, p. 645.

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of amazingly complicated and astute manoeuvring directed towards a purpose which had about it, as far as one can judge, no element of

party politics. The disinterestedness of Fraser's conviction that it was necessary to give further political expression to 'national unity' seems as unquestionable as the skill with which as party manager he sought to bring that end about. Yet it is a fair question whether there was not in his approach to the problem a weakness on which the Hon. W. Downie Stewart laid his finger when he said, at the time of the RSA plan, that if the Prime Minister proposed to give War Cabinet representation to sectional interests 'he will certainly imperil or destroy such national unity as we possess, which is probably greater than he realises <sup>1</sup>.' The force of Stewart's comment is not confined to the dangers of giving special representation to economic interests, though Fraser's partiality to such plans suggests a certain insensitiveness to the spirit of the constitution. Pressure groups, it might be argued, already received quite enough consideration, and it was no more desirable in war than it was in peace for ministers to be freed from the responsibility of answering for their actions to an elected assembly.

It can be argued further that the very tenacity with which Fraser drove his reluctant colleagues and opponents towards formal cooperation was in the nature of things liable to produce results the opposite of those he intended. In fact it appeared to do just that. The recriminations of October 1942, the sharpening antipathies, and the resumption of party politics were a disappointing sequel to the 'sincere effort to achieve national political unity', which, said Fraser, had been 'succeeding admirably <sup>2</sup>.' Yet it may be that the whole incident had not so altered the situation as clarified it.

The issue on which the War Administration broke down was the attitude to be taken by cabinet towards a major strike in wartime. **Holland** associated himself emphatically with the firm, even violent, words used by Labour ministers during Fraser's absence. When it came to the point, however, these ministers returned to the line of thought subsequently expressed by the Minister of Mines. 'The use of the big stick,' he said, 'can only aggravate a delicate situation. The miners will not be bludgeoned. Most of them can see reason, and reason ultimately



prevailed.' Possibly cabinet had seen itself as following the lead given by Fraser at the time of the freezing workers' strike in March.<sup>3</sup> Fraser himself, however, was sharply aware of the practical differences between a strike of freezing workers in March and a strike of miners in September. He

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Post*, 20 May 1942.

<sup>2</sup> Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 230.

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thought it better that the Government should eat the words of its lesser members than that it should, at that time and place, face industrial chaos. This was the change of front that **Holland** could not follow. His view of 21 September, he explained later, was that the ring-leaders should have been imprisoned, and the rest given forty-eight hours to get back to work under penalty of being drafted into the army.<sup>1</sup> This action, he was convinced, would have broken the strike. It remains a matter for speculation whether use of the relatively accessible open-cast pits and the threat of prison or the army—even if widely approved in the community—could have produced coal within the few days that existing stocks would have kept industry going; and there was no indication of what **Holland** would have done next to 'enforce the law'.

Even if it be conceded, however, that Fraser took the only really practicable course in his treatment of the strikers, it does not necessarily follow that **Holland** and his colleagues were wrong in making a startling protest; the remarkable drop in the following year in the number of days lost through strikes suggests that the militant unions had been put on their mettle and had taken to heart the implications of the impending general election.<sup>2</sup> From the standpoint of securing industrial peace there was something to be said for a situation in which a sympathetic, even indulgent, Government was under fire from an



**Opposition behind whom loomed the remembered shades of 'Massey's Cossacks'.**

**After the dissolution of the War Administration the conflict between the parties, apparently sharpened by the difference in personality and approach between the two leaders, was so manifest that no further attempt was made to bridge it. It may be doubted, however, whether these disagreements cut deeply at the essentials of New Zealand's unity in wartime purpose, and whether the resumption of party politics absorbed to a serious extent abilities which might have been more effectively expended in a national war effort. On the one hand, during most of 1942, while the crisis remained really acute, there was, after all, widespread agreement on the most important things which had to be done. On the other hand, in 1943, as military tensions eased, the issues were such as could be actively debated, and in September it was possible, by general agreement, to pass through the political system the cleansing winds of a general election.**

**In 1942, for example, there was agreement not only on the need to mobilise every possible man into the armed forces for national self-defence, but on the essence of the economic policy to deal with**

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, p. 634.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 263.

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**the situation caused by the withdrawal of so many men and women from productive work. Direction of civilian man- and woman-power was an obvious measure, but however ingenious such direction, and however hard individuals worked, economic dislocation was inevitable, and in particular a drastic shrinkage in available goods and services at a time when money was circulating freely. In New Zealand's past experience—and in some contemporary experiences overseas—such conditions had produced big price-increases and transfers of wealth, which amounted**

for most of the population to a severe but haphazard fall in standards of living. No one wished this to happen again in New Zealand, least of all the Labour ministers who had so fiercely denounced this aspect of New Zealand's war-making in 1914–18. To allow it would have been to deny the firmly held tenets of the Labour Party, to have flown in the face of prejudices shared by an overwhelming majority of New Zealanders, and to have weakened the determination and willingness to accept physical sacrifice which were essential to effective war-making. Accordingly, from the first the Government made clear its resolution to protect, so far as possible, the social welfare with which its regime was associated: in the Prime Minister's later phrase, to keep standards 'intact or recoverable', in spite of war. Social services should therefore be maintained, even improved. As in peacetime, price increases should as far as possible be prevented, but more particularly the prices of basic necessities should be held down. In principle, those whose budgets did not in any case extend beyond necessities would thus be protected. At the other end of the scale, it was laid down firmly that no one should profit from the war situation. There was no question that standards of living in the community as a whole must fall: yet the loss could perhaps be kept to small proportions, and be suffered primarily by those who could best afford it. War taxation, the increased cost of imports and shortages of goods would bring inevitable adjustments. Yet so far as the civilian population was concerned it did not appear to be inconceivable that matters could be so arranged that no one would either gain or lose very greatly from the war situation. Some such objective, with the proviso that those closest to the bread-line should lose least, would be in tune with public sentiment, and a natural policy for a self-professed welfare state at war.

The whole matter came to the front in August 1940, when the Arbitration Court granted a 5 per cent wage increase to those working under awards: an action which illustrated the problem rather than created it. In September the Government convened a widely representative economic conference 'to consider the possibility of stabilising costs, prices and wages, and to discuss expanding production

so that the strain of war expenditure may be successfully borne and the standard of living be maintained as far as possible.' This conference, and a committee drawn equally from employers and trade-unionists, was composed of men deeply involved in New Zealand's politico-economic problems; but they produced a unanimous report. This was the basis of the policy of Economic Stabilisation, which was followed with some consistency and considerable success throughout the war. At first its operations depended on general government policy and on the decisions of the **Price Tribunal**, though the retail prices of thirty-eight essential commodities were stabilised. In December 1942, however, the threads of economic policy were drawn together in an elaborate stabilisation scheme. In principle, prices, costs and incomes were to remain fixed at the level they had reached on 15 December. It was clear, however, that wages could not be held if prices rose substantially. Accordingly, the prices of 110 important items were stabilised—if necessary by subsidies—and a new and elaborate cost of living index was worked out and published quarterly; if this varied widely, wage adjustments would follow. According to this index there was practically no change in the cost of living for the rest of the war period <sup>1</sup>.

This whole phase of New Zealand's wartime life demands patient probing by economists. From the political point of view, however, the situation was sufficiently remarkable. 'Stabilisation' intimately affected every citizen. A new and lively government department—the **Economic Stabilisation Commission**—dealt with almost every economic issue that arose; and its advice was rarely neglected. <sup>2</sup> There were, of course, infinitely numerous opportunities for complaint that the system was maladministered, or pressed on some people unfairly, and indeed complaints were frequent. Yet this fundamental item of economic policy retained throughout the war a quality possible only when there was national agreement. This was, perhaps, most noteworthy in respect of the Labour movement, for the very notion of 'stability' cut at the root of traditional Labour attitudes. The Labour parties of the New World had been built on the assumption of indefinite progress and on the belief that the world's economic resources, if developed for the public good,

were infinite. Belief ran deep, therefore, that there was no limit to social betterment, that he who was not moving forward was losing ground, and that the difficulties of employers and even of governments were the opportunities of trade unionists. The plea that such opportunities must be forgone in the public interest was hard to argue with men who remembered the course of things

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, December 1940, p. 189; March 1941, p. 388; March 1943, p. 193. *New Zealand Official Year-Book*, 1946, p. 594.

<sup>2</sup> L. C. Webb in ed. Belshaw, *New Zealand*, p. 288.

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during the First World War and during the slump. Nor was wartime New Zealand free of labour troubles, of tensions which remained hidden and explosive, or of men of all classes who drove shrewd bargains. Nevertheless, Peter Fraser's government held the Labour movement, and with it New Zealanders as a whole, on an unaccustomed course. To the end, there was an area of national life exempt from the more wasteful forms of party controversy: and that area included the major elements of wartime policy—the principle of whole-hearted military co-operation; the principle of selling New Zealand's major exports to **Britain** at stable and relatively low prices; and the principle of domestic economic stabilisation.

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

# CHAPTER 18 – THE SCARCITY OF NEW ZEALANDERS

## CHAPTER 18

### *The Scarcity of New Zealanders*

IN July 1942, apart from considerable numbers serving under British command, there were 154,550 New Zealanders in the Dominion's armed forces <sup>1</sup>-nearly 10 per cent of the population-and the Army was clamouring for more. The demand for food and services was increasing sharply as American troops poured into the **Pacific** area. These simple facts set a conundrum for the **New Zealand Government**. Moreover, further calls were to come. Reinforcements would be needed in the **Middle East**, and it was no one's wish that New Zealand should confine her activities in the **Pacific** to food production and the defence of her own home territory. In the American organisation of the **Pacific** war, New Zealand fell into Admiral Nimitz's Pacific Ocean area, and within that, into the **South Pacific Command** under Admiral Ghormley. For practical purposes she was in fact the only South Pacific ally whose resources were to be combined with those of the American navy. The teaming together of the very small with the very great was a problem for both, especially since the pick of New Zealand's army was in North Africa. The Dominion, however, had no desire to be a passive or merely civilian partner, and her claim for political and military responsibility was conceded-maybe with some irritation at times-by the Americans. Yet the making good of the claim, existing commitments being what they were, set a task which became, in the end, impossibly difficult.

Admiral Ghormley set up his headquarters in **Auckland** in May 1942, the same month that the first substantial batch of American marines reached the country. As in the **Middle East**, awkward problems of command and personal relationship had to be worked out. The general principles were clear. The use of each country's forces was, ultimately, a political decision, and each had an admitted right to 'refuse the use of its forces for any project which it considered inadvisable <sup>2</sup>.' In general, however, the American commanders were in charge; and the New Zealand armed forces were told that all orders from the Commander-in-Chief, **Pacific** area, were to be accepted as emanating from the New

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary paper H-19B, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> King to Nash, 14 Apr 1942.

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Difficulties connected with the Army were of a different character. Its equipment was in any case British, not American, and in May a potentially awkward situation was entirely cleared up. The defence of **Tonga** and **Fiji** was a New Zealand responsibility which was taken seriously. **Fiji**, in particular, was regarded as vital for the defence of New



Zealand, and it was feared, apparently correctly, that the Japanese were preparing an attack. <sup>3</sup> In spite of New Zealand's efforts, the defences clearly could not deal with a major attack, <sup>4</sup> and in April the Americans were pressed to send reinforcements. Their first reaction was that **Fiji** was only one among a number of problems to be considered. On 6 May, however, they suddenly announced that they proposed to take full responsibility for the defence of **Fiji** and **Tonga**. <sup>5</sup> American troops already on the way to New Zealand would be diverted to **Fiji** and the New Zealand garrison would be returned to its own country. New Zealand naturally welcomed this relief, but suggested that her own troops should remain in **Fiji** alongside the Americans; the Chiefs of Staff had always insisted on the importance of **Fiji** to New Zealand, and her troops there had been strongly reinforced

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<sup>1</sup> PM to Chiefs of Staff, 9 May 1942.

<sup>2</sup> PM to Nash, 19 Jun 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Gillespie, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. report to **Washington** by Lt-Gen D. C. Emmons.-  
Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Nash to PM, 6 May 1942.

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in the first half of 1942. The American decision, however, was to take full charge, and they delivered home the bulk of the New Zealand forces, expressing the hope that these men might be 'made available for amphibious training with our 1st Marine Division in anticipation of joint offensive action to the north-west <sup>1</sup>.' The suggestion that New Zealand troops should train with the marines for active operations had been made by Nash to King on 7 May, primarily it would seem as an inducement to the Americans to send more marine divisions to New

Zealand.<sup>2</sup> However, the destruction of Japanese carrier strength at the Midway battle on 4 June changed the aspect of the Pacific war. The immediate objective became un-mistakeably not to check the Japanese advance but to begin the counter-attack. Accordingly, the men withdrawn from Fiji became the nucleus of another expeditionary force, which was to uphold New Zealand's Pacific character and precipitate a first-class crisis in policy-making.

The force commonly, though not officially, known as the 3rd Division was technically born on 14 May 1942,<sup>3</sup> when its main elements were in Fiji, though it was not until 6 August that War Cabinet formally decided that 'a Division be established and trained in New Zealand for offensive purposes-the basis of the Division to be the Fijian Force and the 7th Brigade Group.' This decision was in response to an American request; but there were delays and confusion. On the American side, the Chiefs of Staff in Washington envisaged New Zealand troops taking part in amphibious operations alongside their own forces. Admiral Ghormley, as theatre commander, was short of equipment for amphibious troops, and asked rather for garrison forces to take over areas which had been captured by the marines. It was his request in July for such forces-to be ready by 25 August-that led the New Zealand Government formally to create a division for service in the Pacific. Even then, it remained somewhat doubtful as to what kind of a force the Americans wanted and by what date. New Zealand, for her part, insisted on her right of prior consultation. Before any troops went overseas, her government insisted on being 'fully informed of the nature of the operations, and convinced that the plan offers a reasonable prospect of success<sup>4</sup>.' This condition may have been somewhat embarrassing to the American commanders, and was perhaps a factor in their delays. Yet New Zealand's standards of proof were not exacting; and New Zealand, for her part, was very willing to provide, if she could, whatever it might be that the

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to PM, 24 Jun 1942; Gillespie, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Nash to PM, 8 May 1942.

<sup>3</sup> Gillespie, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> DCGS to Maj-Gen Mead, 18 Aug 1942.

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Americans wanted: so willing, indeed, that on 10 August the Government made Ghormley a promise, which could not have been fulfilled, that a division would be available for embarkation on 25 August. <sup>1</sup> In this month Fraser visited **Washington**, and he was briefed to urge upon the President that the **Pacific** was the most promising area for an offensive. <sup>2</sup> The Solomons offensive, then being launched, was likely to be particularly acceptable to New Zealand as being the result of a decision of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff to 'mount a limited offensive to halt the Japanese advance toward the line of communications from the **United States** to **Australia** and New Zealand <sup>3</sup>.' It was axiomatic, therefore, that nothing except quite insuperable obstacles should prevent any New Zealand participation which the Americans might desire.

Never theless, there were great obstacles to meeting the American request for ground troops. Manpower was running short in New Zealand as a whole. In July, for example, there was felt to be a desperate shortage of farm labour to cope with the approaching primary production season, and with the slight relief in tension given by the American naval victory at Midway, 6000 farm workers were released from camp. Moreover, although enough men were available to form a division, they were by no means adequately trained for the work in hand, even those who had been in **Fiji**. For New Zealand's good name it perhaps was well that Ghormley did not call for the division which was to have been ready in August. The marines, in fact, met unsuspected difficulties in **Guadalcanal**; while fierce fighting continued, there could be no question of replacing them by garrison troops. General Barrowclough accordingly had two months more to form and train a new expeditionary

force.

It was a difficult task. Neither the New Zealand nor the United States Government was very clear as to what was wanted, and in particular the Americans could still not indicate the size of the force they would need nor at what time. Partly for this reason, though the new force was in principle a division, training kept in view the possibility that a smaller formation might be asked for. Accordingly, priority was given to the completion of training one, followed by a second, brigade group within **3 Division**. In fact a battalion was detached from it on 7 October for the defence of **Norfolk Island**, and shortly afterwards another was allocated to **Tonga**. Finally, on 16 October, with the issue on **Guadalcanal** still undecided, Admiral Ghormley requested that two brigades be sent to **New Caledonia**. War Cabinet gave its consent immediately and

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<sup>1</sup> Gillespie, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Actg PM to PM, 27 Aug 1942.

<sup>3</sup> **US Army** in World War II, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive*, p. 1.

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over the next three months the main body of **3 Division** was moved to **New Caledonia**. New Zealand was committed to a major effort, under American command, in the **Pacific** theatre.

However, men were needed for the **Mediterranean** as well as the **Pacific**. The 2nd New Zealand Division had not received reinforcements since October 1941. It suffered nearly 5000 casualties in the Libyan battles at the end of that year, and in June 1942 was flung into the defence of Egypt, with 7000 further casualties. If reinforcements were much longer delayed, a reduction in the size of the Division would be inevitable. On 25 July Churchill raised the matter, and appealed to New Zealand to keep 'this splendid unit on its present basis.' The Government

agreed. On 5 August both Churchill and **Freyberg** were told that reinforcements would be sent, though with a warning that future policy was uncertain. On 29 August War Cabinet approved the despatch of 5500 men, including a tank battalion. This draft, the 8th Reinforcements, sailed on 12 December 1942.

To overseas commitments the Government's advisers had to add those arising from the need to maintain local defences against possible attack on New Zealand itself. In September War Cabinet reported that a 'very critical position still obtains in the **Pacific**',<sup>1</sup> and in mid-October the Army put its 'very minimum' needs for this purpose as 72,850. Reporting this calculation to a secret session of Parliament, the National Service Department estimated that if this force were to be maintained locally, the **Pacific** division built up and naval and air force requirements met, some 191,000 persons would have to be withdrawn from industry. This was an increase of about 30,000 over the peak mobilisation figure of the middle of the year, which had fallen since then owing to releases for primary industry. And this figure did not include any further reinforcements that might have to be sent to the **Middle East**. The dangers of such a degree of mobilisation had been pointed out a month before by a departmental committee on war planning and manpower. Without a 'properly planned and coordinated programme of adjustment... any attempt to achieve these releases to the armed services ... will manifestly end in widespread disorganisation to essential production and entirely disordered national economy.' Such a planned programme, as sketched out by the committee, would have involved a drastic modification of the pattern of peacetime life, much more drastic than in fact ever took place. A minimum working week was proposed of 48 hours for manual work and 44 hours for shops and clerical work, for instance, and non-essential services and commodities were to be eliminated. The plan was tentative, an  
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<sup>1</sup> Actg PM to SSSA, 9 Sep 1942.

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of the kind of things that would have to be done; and even if it had been theoretically adequate, the conclusion by no means follows that an additional thirty or forty thousand men could have been mobilised without the most serious consequences. Administrative difficulties would have been immense, and unless the community had been confronted with an immediate threat of invasion or defeat, discontent at such drastic measures might well have been keen enough to cause that economic dislocation which they had been designed to avoid

Short of desperate measures, then, there were not enough New Zealanders to maintain major expeditionary forces in two areas, and at the same time to keep up the flow of goods and services on which the Allied war effort in the **Pacific** increasingly depended. When, therefore, the situation in the **Middle East** improved spectacularly with the victory at **Alamein** and the Allied landing in French North Africa, the **New Zealand Government** raised the question of returning its **Middle East** division. On 19 November Fraser put the case personally to Churchill.<sup>1</sup> He told him that the request would have been made earlier but for the dangerous situation in the **Middle East** and **Russia**.

Now, however, with the launching of the most promising Anglo-American offensive, the immediate security of the **Middle East**, which we have always regarded as of such vital importance, appears for all practical purposes to have been achieved, and with the accession of large new forces from the **United States** and **Britain** the presence of one New Zealand division in this theatre becomes a matter of diminishing importance. Here in the **Pacific**, on the other hand, we are faced not only with the possibility that **Japan** may launch further offensive action, both to retrieve the situation resulting from her recent setbacks and to take advantage of the preoccupations of the **United Nations** in **Europe** and **Africa**, but also with what we regard as the necessity that the **United Nations** should launch a counter-offensive at the earliest possible date. It is felt that the place of the 2nd New Zealand Division in

either case is here in the South Pacific.

There was, he wrote, a 'general feeling in the country that our men have a strong claim to return, particularly in view of the extremely heavy casualties which our Division has suffered-some 18,500 so far out of a total of 43,500 sent to the **Middle East**'. He referred to Curtin's request for the withdrawal of the last Australian division in the **Middle East**, and added, 'It will be appreciated that it would be absolutely impossible for the **New Zealand Government** to resist the strong feeling to which I have referred should it become known that all three Australian divisions have returned.' The plain fact, he told Churchill, was that 'the limit of our manpower resources in New Zealand has been reached', but his conclusion was to emphasise that the men would not be stationed

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 142.

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permanently in New Zealand. The return of the Division was asked for as a necessary step towards full participation in the long drive against **Japan**. <sup>1</sup>

Faced with this request, and the parallel request from **Australia**, Churchill vigorously stated the case against withdrawing the two divisions concerned, and urged that the views of the Americans, who were sending such substantial aid to the South Pacific, must be carefully weighed. 'It would cause me much regret to see the New Zealand Division quit the scene of its glories,' he cabled to Fraser on 24 November, 'but I quite understand your feelings and am aware how embarrassing the withdrawal of the 9th Australian Division would be to you.' He quoted, from a cable just sent to Curtin, the remark that 'The matter is one on which the Combined Chiefs of Staff at **Washington**, who alone have the central point of view, should advise in the first instance', and he added in the message to Fraser, 'I am sure that, having regard to the great contribution the **United States** are now making to the defence of the Southern Pacific and the still greater efforts we must



expect from them, it would be a mistake for **Australia** and New Zealand to ignore the opinion of the **United States** military authorities.' The Australians, however, insisted on their rights. On 2 December Churchill cabled that the last Australian division was accordingly being withdrawn, which 'makes the retention of the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** more necessary to us, though your difficulties are understood.' He gave details of the grave shipping difficulties arising from the Australian action, and of the still greater difficulties that would be caused by the return of the New Zealand Division.

At this stage the problem was referred to a secret session of Parliament held on 3 December. No record of the discussion has survived, except the fact that 'some members, including the Leader of the Opposition', thought that War Cabinet should not have suggested the withdrawal of the Division from the **Middle East** without consulting Parliament.<sup>2</sup> In the upshot the decision of the House was unanimously that the Division should remain where it was for the time being; though **J. A. Lee** apparently said that it should return as soon as the campaign in North Africa was finished. 'We cannot take the responsibility in the circumstances that you outline,' Fraser told Churchill, 'of pressing for the return of the New Zealand Division at this juncture.' In the same cable, however, Churchill was told that the Government still thought that, from the Dominion viewpoint, the reasons given for the return of the

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<sup>1</sup> Nash was instructed to make this point clear to the Americans.-Fraser to Nash, 7 Dec 1942, *Documents*, II, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 493.

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Division were valid and might be raised again. Moreover, an important additional argument was for the first time put on record: 'it would be neither wise nor proper to allow the offensive against **Japan** in the South Pacific to be conducted entirely by the Americans without



**substantial British collaboration <sup>1</sup>.'**

**When the House met in open session on 4 December, therefore, the major decision had been made. If any doubt remained it would have been dispelled by the decision made by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in **Washington** on that same day, at a meeting where New Zealand was represented. 'Every military argument,' reported this high authority, was against the transfer of the Australian and New Zealand divisions, which would actually weaken the defence of the two dominions. <sup>2</sup> New Zealand's decision to leave her division in the **Middle East** was, however, professedly a temporary one, and left intact the reasons which were making the disposition of New Zealand's armed forces a political issue. Already in October, during the debate which followed his resignation from the War Administration, the Leader of the Opposition had said, 'The time is overripe for a full discussion on the man-power question. I feel that we are trying to do far too much <sup>3</sup>.' A few days later **J. A. Lee**, then a Labour rebel, made the first serious attack on the Government's manpower policy to be delivered in open session. 'An overwhelming majority of the members of this House are conscious that our manpower targets are too vast,' he declared. 'We do not know what is proposed for 1943; for 1944; for 1945. We are already calling up married men-and at an age at which I do not believe many of them will be able to withstand the circumstances of hazardous soldiering.... We all know that if we go ahead at the present rate we will be out of the war very rapidly.' The House should be told how many men were to be put in the field over the next three years 'and what New Zealand will be like when they are in the field <sup>4</sup>.' Now in December the theme was taken up again by Holland. He argued that New Zealand could not maintain a large force mobilised at home in addition to its overseas commitments, and complained that 'from a man-power point of view the armed forces take no cognizance whatever of civilian requirements.' He emphasised that 'whatever commitments the War Cabinet has made, whether we concur with them or not, we must stand by them'- presumably a reference to the decision to send the force to **New Caledonia**-but he hoped that 'in future, before we are committed to anything further, we will have an opportunity of**

<sup>1</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 4 Dec 1942, *Documents*, II, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Nash to PM, 5 Dec 1942, *Documents*, II, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol 261, p. 637.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 759-60.

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opinions on the matters in hand <sup>1</sup>.' Fraser made it quite clear that no such opportunity could be guaranteed: 'provided there is plenty of time to consult Parliament, that will be done, but if there is not time to do that and immediate action is called for, then the War Cabinet must take the full responsibility.... If there are no Ministers available, the Prime Minister must and ought to take responsibility for making the decision.' If members disapproved of any action taken they would be given the fullest opportunity of discussing it regardless of Standing Orders. <sup>2</sup>

In his remarks in open session Fraser had agreed that the time had come when the size of the force necessary in New Zealand could be reconsidered. It was indeed only in this direction that even a temporary respite from the manpower dilemma seemed possible. Actually, the day before the secret session the Chiefs of Staff had reported that 'an attempt by the Japanese to invade this country in the near future is hardly even a remote possibility... <sup>3</sup>.' If this were so then the force of some 52,000 men remaining in New Zealand after the despatch of the **Pacific** force and the reinforcements to the **Middle East** could obviously be cut considerably, and steps to reduce it by 20,000 men were taken in February 1943. However, reduction in home defences provided only a temporary and partial solution to the problem. The great need was for men fit for overseas service-not only for the overseas divisions but also for the Air Force, which planned an increase to 17 or 18 squadrons

during 1943-but 35,000 of those in the Army in New Zealand were ineligible for overseas service because of age or medical grading. To some extent they could be used to replace the fit men held on appeal, of whom there were about 40,000, including 25,000 in farming. Yet such replacement was difficult to achieve, especially since the requirements of the American forces in the **Pacific** made necessary not a mere maintenance but a positive increase in primary production.

The facts seemed to show increasingly that it would be impossible for New Zealand to maintain two major overseas forces: if this were so, the obvious course of action in late 1942 was to refrain from sending **3 Division** into the **Pacific** unless **2 Division** could be brought home. Yet there were political arguments in favour of taking an active part in the **Pacific** campaign. In the debate on 4 December, indeed, the Prime Minister challenged the whole Anglo-American strategy which subordinated the **Pacific** theatre to **Europe**: 'I do not believe in the theory of a holding war in the **Pacific** while the fullest efforts are concentrated on one second front

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, pp. 956-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 974.

<sup>3</sup> COS Paper

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in **Europe**.' He rejoiced that 'we have taken up forward positions in the **Pacific** as we always intended. It is only right that we should take part in the **Pacific** offensive which will keep the Japanese as far as possible from our shores <sup>1</sup>.' He concluded that, however important the more distant battlefields, 'we must still concentrate our most immediate attention upon the **Pacific**, where we live.... If we have our eyes on the ends of the earth, and the campaigns waged there, and not at our own doors, then we are heading for disaster <sup>2</sup>.' This emphasis on the **Pacific** was not challenged by an Opposition that was in full cry. They were

quite sure that the Government had promised too much, but under pressure resolutely refused to say that a force should not have been sent to the **Pacific**, or to offer any more practicable suggestion than the reduction of home forces. The party was said to be entirely in favour of the maintenance of both forces-of forces in the **Middle East** with reinforcements, and forces in the **Pacific**, with reinforcements. <sup>3</sup> Both parties, in short, agreed on the need to take a major part in the **Pacific**; but neither had quite faced the consequences of doing this while 2 Division remained in the **Middle East**.

It was a striking illustration of the importance attached to the political arguments for activity in the **Pacific** that, in spite of manpower problems, War Cabinet now agreed to increase the strength of 3 **Division**, and so fit it for combat in place of garrison duty. A full division had, of course, been originally contemplated, and the Americans said in December 1942 that it would be of great assistance if it could be completed. <sup>4</sup> General Barrowclough stressed that, as at present constituted, his force could not take over from an American division and urged its completion to divisional strength. <sup>5</sup> This was approved in principle in February. <sup>6</sup> Later in the month Admiral Halsey, who had succeeded Ghormley in command of the South Pacific area, approved of the proposed reductions in the army in New Zealand and asked that 'the third division be completed to war establishment of a full division, as planned, as soon as this can be done <sup>7</sup>.' The necessary increase, together with minor adjustments in the **Pacific** forces, was approved by War Cabinet on 6 March; 5500 men in all were involved. <sup>8</sup>

Parliament had been in session since 24 February, so it seems clear that War Cabinet preferred to make its decision before the

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 261, pp. 952-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 974.

<sup>3</sup> **Ibid.**, pp. 956-9.

<sup>4</sup> **Puttick to Park**, 5 Dec 1942.

<sup>5</sup> **Barrowclough to Puttick**, 17 Jan 1943.

<sup>6</sup> **War Cabinet Minute**, 4 Feb 1943.

<sup>7</sup> **Coates to PM**, 27 Feb 1943. Halsey had taken over the **South Pacific Command** from Ghormley in October 1942.

<sup>8</sup> **Expansion was approved from 14,400 all ranks to 17,637.**

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matter was thrown open to discussion by the House. This happened on 17 March, when the House was invited to approve a report providing for the absorption by the forces in the following year of 27,000 men-including 10,000 for the Air Force. A home defence force of 28,800 was to be supplemented by a reserve of 50,000 who would receive annual training. <sup>1</sup> A furious debate followed. **Holland** said that the critical decision to convert the **Pacific** force from a garrison to a combat unit had been taken in defiance of the House. He claimed that during a recent parliamentary discussion (apparently the secret session of 3 December) 80 per cent of the members including the Prime Minister had agreed with his statement that it was impossible to maintain two forces on active service overseas. It would be quite impossible, he said, to provide the necessary reinforcements, since balloting had been completed and, apart from youths coming of age, the only source of manpower was from fit men still held in industry. The same line of argument was developed forcefully by **J. A. Lee**. Discussing the decision taken in the previous year to send reinforcements to the **Middle East**, he said 'we were given to understand that the maximum commitments of New Zealand for reinforcements was two thousand. When we met again it had grown to five thousand and there was a ship in the harbour.

Where is parliamentary control?... We make commitments, and somebody comes along and says, "Now boys, you cannot let us down," and we add overnight to the commitments <sup>2</sup>.' Several Labour members suggested that the **Middle East** division would soon have to be brought back; and, on the other hand, there seemed to be general uneasiness among Nationalist members at the build-up of the **Pacific** division.

The Prime Minister agreed with the comment of a Nationalist member that 'it is all one battle', but he none the less implied that this line of thought could be carried too far. 'It is important,' he said, 'that our voice will carry weight both now and in the future, as far as the **Pacific** is concerned, and that we should win the right to be heard with respect. We cannot do that if we scuttle out of our responsibilities in the **Pacific** <sup>3</sup>.' When General Williams visited New Zealand three years earlier he had urged the Government 'that our contribution must be given as quickly as possible, and that we must give the full strength of what we could do within four years. After that had been done we would have to consolidate on what our position was then.' That four years would be up at the end of the time covered by the new proposals and 'We can

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<sup>1</sup> Cyclostyled memorandum by Minister of National Service, 11 Mar 1943.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 443.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 496.

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then see what we can continue to do <sup>1</sup>.' He indicated that the future of the **Middle East** division could be reconsidered when **Tunisia** had been cleared of the enemy, <sup>2</sup> and the general drift of his speech seemed to indicate that it would be that division which would eventually be recalled-'When they come back and rest, they could assist in the **Pacific** <sup>3</sup>.' In any case, everything possible must be done to release some of the long-service men with that division. <sup>4</sup>

This last remark was a reference to the so-called 'furlough' scheme, which later caused great difficulty. The basic idea was that of giving some relief to men who had served overseas since 1940, since a considerable further period of service in the **Middle East** was in prospect. In February **General Freyberg** was told that 'The Government has been considering the practicability of bringing back to New Zealand personnel who have been absent from New Zealand for three years and increasing the reinforcement draft to compensate.' **General Freyberg** was not unfavourable, and reported that it should be possible to arrange a satisfactory scheme;<sup>5</sup> but General Puttick advised against any general return<sup>6</sup> of long-service men to New Zealand. Consideration of the matter continued pending the end of the Tunisian campaign and was a factor in discussions on the future of the Division.

In the end the Government's proposals were approved without a vote. Indeed, when it came to the point, the Opposition did not suggest an alternative policy. Even under pressure, the Leader of the Opposition still refused to say what, in his view, New Zealand's policy in the **Pacific** should be.<sup>7</sup> His chief followers stressed that home defence forces should be cut down and production maintained. They protested vehemently against the **Pacific** division being made a combat force without parliamentary approval; but, except for one obscure suggestion, did not advocate that the decision should be reversed, or maintain that they would have opposed it if Parliament had been consulted.<sup>8</sup> Their demand for the transfer of men from the army in New Zealand to industry was relevant to the country's economic situation but did not bear directly on the problem of overseas reinforcements.

Two points emerged from the whole episode, however. The first was evidence that Parliament was much less inclined than War Cabinet to accept an 'all out' manpower policy. The second was a

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 503.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.



<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 504.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 479.

<sup>5</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 224 (24 Feb 1943).

<sup>6</sup> CGS to Minister of Defence, 31 Mar 1943.

<sup>7</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 426.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Speeches by **Holland**, Broadfoot, Polson, Goosman, Gordon.

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firm promise that Parliament would be consulted next time, a promise with immediate practical consequences.

The manpower debate had been preceded by a meeting in the social hall of Parliament Buildings, where members were addressed by the Chiefs of Staff. It may have been here that Fraser, as he later told Churchill, 'gave an undertaking that [the Division's] retention in North Africa, its participation in a European campaign, or its return to New Zealand would be considered at the end of the Tunisian campaign, and that there would be no question of our men being used in any other theatre without the prior knowledge and approval of the House.' Nothing quite so explicit was recorded in open session. Nevertheless, by reason of his pledge, Fraser was unable to comply with Churchill's request of 14 April that the Division should be immediately withdrawn from **Tunisia** to undergo amphibious training for the invasion of **Sicily**. Fraser felt it to be undesirable to call Parliament before 5 May—both because 'a sudden summons of Parliament for next week might give rise to undue alarm and speculation in the country' and endanger the secrecy of the Sicilian operation, also because of 'the effect of any secret session thus summoned on the annual Labour Party conference at Easter <sup>1</sup>.' It was, of



course, from Labour supporters that most of the pressure for the return of the Division was coming, and Fraser said that he could not predict Parliament's decision with certainty. Accordingly, as there was time and equipment to train only one more division in amphibious action, other troops were selected for the invasion of **Sicily**. It should be added that there were valid military arguments against using the Division in this particular operation, arising from its long continuance in the field (since June 1942) without relief. These were duly taken into account, though not stressed in the cabled discussions.

During the manpower debate in March, the Prime Minister was asked whether, if the war lasted another two or three years, New Zealand's effort could be sustained at the existing level. 'No,' he replied, 'we cannot keep it up. Around that lies the whole question <sup>2</sup>.' The Government's proposals, accordingly, were for a short term. They provided for the maintenance of both divisions for the current year only; and in any case the promise stood that the future of the Division in the **Middle East** would be reviewed at the end of the Tunisian campaign. In April Fraser decided that the whole issue must be placed before Parliament. By this time the dilemma was painfully clear. It was still hoped to reinforce both divisions, as planned, till the end of 1943, but there were simply

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<sup>1</sup> PM NZ to PM UK, 16 Apr 1943; *Documents*, II, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 495.

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not enough fit men in the country to maintain them thereafter. One division must therefore be withdrawn or allowed to dwindle, and its manpower used to reinforce the other. 'The time has come to make the decision between the European and **Pacific** theatres.' Fraser's personal views on this problem were in the early stages hard to define. 'We are a **Pacific** nation of the British Commonwealth,' he told Parliament in December 1942, 'and we must survive as a **Pacific** nation <sup>1</sup>.' In March

1943, as we have noted, he hinted broadly that the troops from the **Middle East** might be withdrawn and later serve in the **Pacific**.<sup>2</sup> Even in April he stressed the great political importance of the Commonwealth being strongly represented in the drive against **Japan** and earning the right to speak in the post-war settlement,<sup>3</sup> and he knew that New Zealand was ‘the only country from which British forces can at present be made available for service in the **South Pacific Area**’<sup>4</sup>. He was still struggling to clear his own mind as to what was the right thing to do, and his personal decision was made in mid-May. Thereafter he was clearly doing his best in the face of considerable division of opinion in War Cabinet and in the Labour Party to have 2 Division retained in the **Mediterranean**. That this was desirable from the wide strategical viewpoint seemed clear enough. Such at least was the emphatic judgment of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in **Washington**,<sup>5</sup> which was supported by Roosevelt and Churchill.

On 29 April Fraser told Churchill that he was placing the matter before Parliament, and appealed for his help. ‘There is a strong section, particularly among Government supporters,’ he reported, ‘who desire the early return of the Division at the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign. On the other hand, there is in Parliament and throughout the country a large measure of feeling in favour of the retention of our Division in the **Mediterranean** theatre. I am most anxious to prevent any general split on this question and I attach the highest importance, from the point of view of the unity of the country and the furtherance of the war effort, to obtaining as unanimous a vote as possible on whatever decision is arrived at. A message from you, which I could read to Parliament in secret session, appealing for the retention of the Division “on symbolic and historical as well as military grounds” would, I feel, have very great influence, especially if you could associate President Roosevelt with yourself in the message...’<sup>6</sup> A message on the lines requested

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 261, p. 974.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 262, p. 504.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>6</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 189.

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duly arrived, though only on behalf of Churchill himself. 'General Alexander and General Montgomery,' he cabled, had 'expressed their ardent wishes' that the Division might enter **Europe** with the Allied armies. The military case was strong; yet, said Churchill, his plea rested on other grounds, especially on 'the sentiments which unite our Commonwealth of Nations.... It is the symbolic and historic value of our continued comradeship in arms that moves me. I feel that the intervention of the New Zealand Division on European soil, at a time when the homeland of New Zealand is already so strongly engaged with **Japan**, will constitute a deed of fame to which many generations of New Zealanders will look back with pride <sup>1</sup>.'

Though armed with this instrument of persuasion, War Cabinet took advantage of Churchill's presence in **Washington** to get further advice at the highest possible level. It was quite impossible to maintain both divisions beyond the end of the year, wrote Fraser. 'It would be entirely unwise, we feel, to let either the **Pacific** or the **Mediterranean** division complete its organisation and training and prepare for, and perhaps go into, action in major theatres of war knowing that within a few months from now it was inevitable that one force was to be used for the purpose of reinforcing the other. <sup>1</sup> Churchill was asked to discuss the matter with the President and 'having in mind New Zealand's inability to provide divisions for each theatre, advise as to where you and, if

possible, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, consider that New Zealand troops could most usefully be employed <sup>2</sup>.' The reply was what Fraser no doubt expected. 'Both the President and I,' said Churchill on 17 May, 'feel very strongly that it would be a great pity to withdraw the New Zealand Division from the **Mediterranean** theatre where it has given such splendid service. We hope means will be found to sustain both divisions in their present strength and station. If this cannot be done, it would be better when the time comes to accept a lower establishment.' Churchill also pointed out that 'the shipping required to repatriate the 2nd New Zealand Division will entail a far greater loss in manpower to the **United States** build-up in Great Britain for attacking **France** in 1944 <sup>3</sup>.'

The British and American view was, then, plain. The view of New Zealand's neighbour and indispensable partner, **Australia**, was even plainer, and in a directly contrary sense. The Australian Government had made clear in 1942, and had stated with undiplomatic violence in 1943, its judgment that all Australian and New Zealand forces should be concentrated in the **Pacific** war, the

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

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wishes of the **United States** and **Britain** notwithstanding. The last of three Australian divisions was recalled from the **Middle East**, and the Australians said very bluntly that in their view New Zealand should follow their example and concentrate all her forces in the **Pacific**. The combined manpower of **Australia** and New Zealand would be inadequate even for a 'holding' war in the **Pacific**, said Curtin, the forthright Australian Prime Minister. More forces must be called in as tropical diseases took toll in the islands, and as far as possible these should be British. 'The Union Jack should fly here as the standard of British

interest in the **Pacific**. This ... makes all the more desirable joint Dominion forces as preferable to those of a foreign ally.' Carl Berendsen, formerly head of the Prime Minister's Department and now New Zealand High Commissioner in **Canberra**, reported these views after an interview with Curtin on 17 May. He added that 'The Prime Minister obviously felt strongly on this matter as indicated by incidental remarks during the discussion; for example: "that is precisely the line that Churchill and Roosevelt took with me, and if I had listened to them we should have lost **New Guinea**," and "it is tough that we should be asked to supply munitions to New Zealand while New Zealand troops are still in the **Middle East**" <sup>1</sup>.' Berendsen himself wrote that 'on the balance narrowly, but definitely' he agreed with Curtin's contention that 'all New Zealand troops should be available for the **Pacific**.' When the decision had to be made, Curtin's attitude was naturally one of the factors causing the most 'worried consideration ... of the problem and much searching of heart and conscience by Ministers and members alike <sup>2</sup>.'

Two other major considerations necessarily entered into War Cabinet's calculations: the views of the men serving in the **Middle East**, and the domestic political situation. The views of servicemen were important both in themselves and as an index to public feeling; the matter was investigated on the spot by the Minister of Defence, and reported to **Wellington** with exasperating but probably accurate obscurity. 'There is a general desire on the part of the Division to return to New Zealand.' It was understood, of course, that a period of leave would be followed by further service, almost certainly in the Islands. No one wanted that, for conditions in the **Solomons** and **New Guinea** were well known; therefore, 'if given the option the majority would prefer this theatre of war'. Nevertheless, if each man were individually consulted 'the great majority would wish to return <sup>3</sup>.' **General Freyberg** reported more succinctly 'if your Division can remain in the **Middle East**, ... your

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 193, 198.

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decision will be welcomed on all sides <sup>1</sup>.' It is not recorded how Fraser summed up for Parliament the views held in the Expeditionary Force.

As to domestic politics, Fraser's problem had a double aspect. Since the breakdown of the War Administration in September 1942 party politics had resumed a lusty if not much respected life, and it was widely agreed that a general election should be held when the war situation permitted. Such an election was now in prospect, and there is on record an analysis, presented to a Labour Party caucus, of the importance in party politics of the decision about to be made on the Middle East Expeditionary Force. 'The decision of the Labour Party,' so ran the notes used by Fraser on this occasion, 'must be profoundly affected by the use to which the Opposition would put the refusal to agree to Mr Churchill's plan and instead to bring the men back home. This may still be the logical course. It may be the course which best serves New Zealand's interests, but, politically it will be the means of giving the Opposition a political plank upon which they are to base their forthcoming campaign. Mr Lee, on the other hand, will direct his appeal to mothers, wives and families, all under the guise of furthering New Zealand's true **Pacific** interests. He would have us concentrate our manpower on industrial production and, no doubt, send what we can spare into the **Pacific**.' It by no means follows that the considerations outlined in these remarks greatly influenced the Prime Minister's policy. His personal view was by this time clearly enough that the Division should stay where it was; but his own party contained most of those who thought it should be recalled. He was fighting for a parliamentary decision that would be virtually unanimous.

With the facts assembled and preparations made, the secret session

held on 20 and 21 May passed smoothly. Only seven members spoke, 'in an atmosphere almost entirely removed from party politics and partisanship.... Although no vote was taken, only six or seven members could be said to favour the return of the 2nd NZEF to New Zealand, and four or five of them would not have voted against the Government if a division had been taken <sup>2</sup>.' In substance, the proposals jointly put forward by the Government and War Cabinet were endorsed. It was decided that the 2nd NZEF would be left in the **Middle East** in the meantime and be available for operations in **Europe**; that both divisions would 'be maintained for as long as possible with increasingly smaller establishments in accordance with the availability of manpower'; and that the relief scheme for men with long service in

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 215.

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the **Middle East** would be put into effect. The Pacific division was to be reorganised on a reduced scale and negotiations were to be pushed forward for the incorporation in it of a Fijian mobile brigade. <sup>1</sup> This decision was welcomed by Churchill and Roosevelt with eloquence, and by Curtin with sharp anger. The acute difference in judgment between **Australia** and New Zealand on the issue of withdrawal from the **Middle East** was, indeed, only less remarkable than the manner in which, after very plain speech, the matter quietly dropped. Disagreement on a major issue was obliterated by an overwhelming community of purpose.

The decision reached-to maintain two divisions as long as possible and allow establishments to decline as manpower ran out-was apparently clear, but in reality equivocal. Everyone knew that two divisions could not be maintained at full strength for any length of time-if at all-and that a division much below full strength could not be an effective combat formation. Moreover, Parliament had approved the retention of the Division in the **Middle East** on the express condition that the



'furlough scheme' should be operated immediately.<sup>2</sup> This involved finding about 5000 additional replacements for the **Middle East**; and the only source for them was the body of troops prepared, according to the March decision, to bring **3 Division** up to full strength. On 27 June, accordingly, in spite of the fervent representations of General Barrowclough, War Cabinet made the inevitable decision. The 3rd Division was reduced to two brigades, and the men formerly destined for **New Caledonia** went to the **Middle East**.

This decision was necessarily disappointing to the Americans, though their own uncertainty as to policy may have been a contributing factor. In early June, for example, Rear-Admiral S. T. Wilkinson, Halsey's deputy commander, met War Cabinet and it was agreed that so far as New Zealand's commitments in the **Pacific** were concerned, 'Air came first, Navy second, production third and Army fourth';<sup>3</sup> and Wilkinson said that the New Zealand Division in the **Pacific** would not normally be required for active operations during 1943. A week later, however, General Barrowclough was instructed to prepare his division to be moved forward for combat, the movement to begin in August.<sup>4</sup> War Cabinet approved, but made it clear at the same time that the Division could not be raised to three brigades by New Zealand troops. In July the position was explained to Halsey in **New Caledonia** by William Perry. He expressed great disappointment, and wrote to

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 214, 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Fraser to Halsey, 30 Aug 1943.

<sup>4</sup> COMSOPAC to Barrowclough, 11 Jun 1943.

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Fraser that he was counting on him to maintain the two brigades at full strength.<sup>1</sup> Fraser could only reply that Parliament's decision on the



allocation of the country's remaining resources of manpower had been taken on the advice of Churchill and Roosevelt, that it was intended to maintain the two brigades as long as possible, and that the reinforcements already provided would last a considerable time. Nevertheless, he went on, 'unless there is a change of policy [presumably in the higher direction of the war] which would cause Parliament to vary its decision, the Division in the **Mediterranean** will, when the reinforcement pool in New Zealand has been exhausted, require to be maintained by drawing eventually upon New Zealand troops serving in the **Pacific** <sup>2</sup>.' It proved impracticable to complete the division with the Fijian mobile brigade, and when the force went into action in the **Solomons** between September 1943 and February 1944 it did not really function as a division at all. 'Not once did the brigades co-operate in joint action. Each was employed on an island far from the other and linked only by wireless, aircraft, and landing craft <sup>3</sup>.'

New Zealand had, as planned, kept two divisions in active service overseas till after the end of 1943, yet by then the situation was most unsatisfactory. The 3rd Division consisted of two brigades only, and could therefore not be used interchangeably with an American division. Moreover, it was very clear, as explained by Fraser in May, that even with this reduced establishment, one of the two divisions must very soon be withdrawn and used as reinforcements for the other. Yet, in spite of his warning to Halsey in August, the situation was allowed to drift on without a final decision as to which it should be; and that decision could no longer be postponed. The negotiations with Roosevelt, Churchill and Curtin which had proved so embarrassing in May 1943 had to be undertaken all over again at the beginning of 1944; and this time the decision had to be for action, not merely for postponement.

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<sup>1</sup> Halsey to PM, 21 Aug 1943.

<sup>2</sup> PM to Halsey, 30 Aug 1943.



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 19 – STOCK TAKING

## CHAPTER 19

### Stock Taking

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**NEW ZEALAND'S** military commitments were at their peak towards the end of 1942 at the time the War Administration broke down, and in the months immediately following. Public tension was relieved by the arrival of American forces, though this reinforcement brought its own social problems; but awareness of danger remained acute at the end of 1942. As the American marines battled on **Guadalcanal** many a New Zealand home guardsman calculated rather grimly that, if they failed, his speculations on the probable fate of ill-armed troops facing the Japanese might be disagreeably tested in practice. In 1943 New Zealand's military commitments were slowly and anxiously retrenched; and retrenchment was paralleled in the feelings towards the war of New Zealanders who did not have the stimulus of combat. There was, indeed, no weakening in the judgment that the war must be fought to a victorious conclusion. When the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 declared that the Allies would exact from their enemies 'unconditional surrender', the phrase was accepted without much comment, governmental or private. Vague and emotive in terms of statesmanship, it nevertheless expressed well enough a community's general attitude: and it represented the views of New Zealand as fairly as it did those of her allies. Yet the tensivity of feeling natural during a series of mounting disasters, culminating in danger of invasion, could naturally not be sustained. The sense of urgency declined, and servicemen returning from the **Middle East** complained of slackness and selfishness in the community. The Prime Minister said he agreed with them. 'These things are unfortunately true,' he said in February 1944. 'The question is how far they can be rectified and counteracted and the people roused once more to the sense of danger that they had and the sense of doing the best that is in them [as] they did when we had to dig trenches and hideouts and places to protect the people against bombs <sup>1</sup>.'

**It would be easy to over-emphasise the importance of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Notes of interview, 26 Feb 1944.

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**change of tone in 1943 as compared with 1942. The Prime Minister, though an authoritative witness, was given to warm speech on the spur of the moment. In an earlier phrase, he had remarked in secret session that some people would not believe that a crisis was at hand till bombs appeared on their breakfast table, and was considerably annoyed when the phrase was quoted at him in public. In 1943 the change was perhaps a matter of the way men talked rather than of what they did. Fashions of speech can swing from patriotism towards cynicism without people's behaviour changing in the same degree. A better test than words would lie in the activities and keenness of such bodies as Home Guard and the EPS, which had charge of air-raid precautions, and, still better, the effort and productivity of workers. One set of figures may have significance, that dealing with those of unrest which led to strikes. In 1942, the year of maximum national danger, 51,189 working days were lost in strikes—more than in any year since 1939; in 1943 the figures were down to 14,687—<sup>less</sup> than in any year since 1934. <sup>1</sup> These figures cannot, of course, be taken at face value, for part of the explanation lies in domestic politics. The Nationalists had left the War Administration on the grounds that the Government's leniency to the **Huntly** miners would encourage further strikes, and unionists felt it incumbent upon them to exercise restraint, particularly in view of the approaching general election. This explanation is made more plausible by the swing back in 1944 to 52,602 days lost. <sup>2</sup> Yet economic statistics, for what they are worth, indicate no slackening in effort in 1943 or even in 1944, but rather a return to a strenuous level of war effort, bereft of the spectacular tensions of 1942. Domestic problems—shortages, rationing, pressure on manpower, the difficulties of co-existence with a foreign army, however friendly—these things inevitably diluted the sense of urgency imposed by overseas events.**

New Zealand's trend back towards normal was emphasised by the circumstance that 1943 was an election year. The breakdown of the War Administration made it virtually impossible to postpone the election further, and only Sir Apirana Ngata spoke against the motion moved by the Prime Minister on 25 February that the House of Representatives should not continue in being after 1 November of that year.<sup>3</sup> On this major point, then, there was general agreement, and except for a clash towards its close, the parliamentary session ran fairly smoothly. Much of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Year-Book*, 1946 p. 673. The number of strikes increased from 65 to 69, but this figure gives no indication of their magnitude.

<sup>2</sup> *Year-Book*, 1946, p. 673.

<sup>3</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, pp. 28–36.

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legislation was not contentious, and even received less than a salutary modicum of criticism.<sup>1</sup> As the election of September approached, however, two bills were violently attacked, and these, together with the manpower problem, provided such meagre substance as could be injected into the general election campaign. An amendment to the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act gave workers certain rights to sue employers in the Arbitration Court; there was no appeal to the Supreme Court, and in some instances the onus of proof fell on the defendant employer.<sup>2</sup> Still more difficulty arose from a Servicemen's Settlement and Land Sales Act. This had admirable objectives—to facilitate the settlement on the land of discharged servicemen at reasonable prices, and in general to prevent speculation in land or undue increases in price. The Act gave the Government power to take over land

suitable for subdivision, and to control the prices of all land sales. The basic value of farm land was the productive value, increased or diminished so as to make it a fair value. The basic value of other land was its value on 15 December 1942, also increased or diminished so as to make it a fair value. The processes of valuation were in the hands of various land sales committees, with appeal to a Land Sales Court, but not beyond that to the Supreme Court. The personnel of all these bodies was appointed by the Government. The act undoubtedly placed great power in the hands of the Government, the more so since such terms as productive value, fair value, and average efficient farming, though familiar enough in New Zealand legislation, were so vague that all depended on the administration. The Opposition complained that the Government was using the rehabilitation of servicemen as a cloak for pushing its socialistic schemes and that the act would operate unfairly against the holders of property in land or houses. The Government, however, could cite from previous experience of land speculation and the failure of soldier settlements and rehabilitation in general.

The election was fought by three parties: Labour, National and Democratic Labour, the last being the creation of **J. A. Lee** since his expulsion from the Labour Party in 1940. Between the two main parties there was little difference on major issues, as indeed there had been little difference between the two programmes in the last general election in 1938. The Labour Party relied on its past record, including a creditable war-effort, and the maintenance of social welfare. The National Party claimed in general terms to stand for 'the largest possible measure of freedom for the individual

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<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, December 1943, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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citizen' as against Labour's principle of 'absolute state control and domination <sup>1</sup>.' It favoured a non-party wartime government and urged



that New Zealand's manpower had been over-committed. On domestic issues, it denounced the land sales legislation and the Internal Marketing Department; matters of some substance in view of the importance for economic stabilisation of controlled land values and of marketing under wartime conditions. Nevertheless, the National Party specifically promised to maintain wages and social services, and indeed to extend social security benefits. <sup>2</sup> As for the Democratic Labour Party, Lee joined Holland in saying that New Zealand's manpower was badly over-committed, but he claimed in general to stand to the left of the official Labour party; and he advocated the full use of social credit. All three parties, in fact, put forward welfare programmes rather than challenges to sustained effort: a natural result of New Zealand's physical remoteness from fighting, but not evidence that significantly more could have been done to help the Allied cause. A contemporary remarked that 'No party put forward a policy of "blood, sweat and tears"', <sup>3</sup> which should be read as a criticism of democracy in general and perhaps of New Zealand democracy in particular.

The general election was held on 25 September, when the Labour vote fell somewhat and the Nationalist vote increased slightly as compared with the election of 1938. The Government lost eight seats. It still had an ample parliamentary majority—12 seats in a House of 80—and a substantial majority of votes in the country, especially if those cast for Democratic Labour be counted as being on the whole pro-Labour and anti-National. Forty thousand votes were in fact cast for Lee's party, without winning a single seat. All its candidates except Lee himself lost their deposits, and he was in a minority of 5648 in a constituency where, as official Labour candidate in 1938, his majority (8607) was the largest in New Zealand. The separate recording of the servicemen's votes showed a much higher Labour vote among them than in the electorate as a whole.

These results were variously interpreted. To Holland they indicated a public desire for a non-party war administration. <sup>4</sup> The Prime Minister said, on the contrary, that the country had commanded the Government

**‘to carry out its programme for the war period and in the post-war world.’ To him, the issue of a coalition government was now closed. ‘We do not propose to be handicapped, or trammelled in any way, by sharing the authority**

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<sup>1</sup> **Holland in Christchurch Star-Sun, 24 Sep 1943.**

<sup>2</sup> **Star-Sun, 24 Aug 1943.**

<sup>3</sup> **Round Table, December 1943, p. 97.**

<sup>4</sup> **Star-Sun, 27 Sep 1943; Round Table, December 1943, p. 98.**

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**for carrying out our policy, and the legislative and administrative plans for its realisation, with any person or party which has opposed us and our programme and has been rejected by the people <sup>1</sup>.’ If Fraser gave up the idea of greater formal political unity, it was no longer practical politics. Till the end of the war, New Zealand continued with its odd combination of a War Cabinet in which Labour ministers were joined by two Nationalists holding office as individuals. Of these men, Coates had died in May 1943: he had virtually been repudiated by his party, and intended to contest the next election, like the election in which he first entered Parliament, as an independent. As previously noted, he was replaced in War Cabinet by William Perry, a leading Opposition legislative councillor and President of the RSA.**

**The direction of the war did not lack the expression of Opposition opinion at the highest levels. The upshot of political developments in 1942 and 1943 was a final definition of function. In the secrecy of cabinet, and indeed in secret sessions of Parliament, co-operation ruled. In the publicity of open sessions and the press, the Leader of the Opposition and the majority of his party preserved the right of free speech untrammelled by the responsibilities of office. Whatever strength**

or weakness can be given to a national effort by party politics and party criticism was lustily contributed by the official spokesmen of the National Party from November 1940 till the end of the war, excepting only the brief interlude of the War Administration in mid-1942.

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A problem which somewhat complicated the election campaign, and which in the end set War Cabinet an insoluble problem, was raised by the return to New Zealand in July of the long-service men who had been brought back on furlough from the **Middle East**. This furlough scheme was a condition of Parliament's approval of the proposal to keep the Division in the European theatre, and had been endorsed by **General Freyberg** and his senior officers. Neither parliamentarians nor soldiers foresaw what would happen when the time came for rejoining the Division. Maybe most of the more battle-eager of the men who had gone overseas in the early drafts had eliminated themselves from the furlough scheme by being killed or promoted or becoming indispensable. Yet it would have been difficult in any circumstances to withdraw 5300 men <sup>2</sup> from the fighting zone, restore them for three months to their relatives and

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<sup>1</sup> *Star-Sun*, 29 Sep 1943.

<sup>2</sup> 6012 men returned in July and 115 in October, but 863 of these were men of the Railway Operating Group (being returned to New Zealand for direction into essential work) and other non-furlough personnel.

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friends half-way across the world, and then call on them to return to the front. As it was, the inevitable contrast between the atmosphere of a fighting division and the kind of life that had by and large continued in New Zealand since 1939 was accentuated by the disappearance of such apparent civilian fervour as had developed in the period when a Japanese invasion seemed possible. This slackening of tension was not only likely

to disillusion the furlough men; it caused sympathetic civilians positively to encourage the reaction which many of them felt against the call to return to the **Middle East**.

Even so, it is possible that serious trouble might have been avoided if New Zealand had not been preparing for a general election. The Government was clearly uneasy about the situation from the first, for on 5 August the Director of Publicity told newspapers that there was to be no reference without his permission to 'replacing soldiers on furlough by exempted men now working on farms or in other essential occupations nor to the future composition or disposition of New Zealand force overseas.' However, on 31 August the Leader of the Opposition, during a broadcast speech which opened his election campaign, castigated the Government for over-committing New Zealand's manpower and added that 'in my opinion no man should be sent to the war twice before everybody has gone once <sup>1</sup>.' This remark received some notice in the press, and on 2 September Mr Paul advised newspapers that 'The publication in some newspapers of the statement that after such long service men on furlough should be given the option of voluntarily returning to civil employment, wrongly attributed to Mr Holland in his speech at **Christchurch** on Tuesday night, having destroyed the purpose of my directive of August 5 it is therefore now revoked.'

With the election only a few weeks ahead, policy towards the furlough draft became a political issue, and apparently for this reason War Cabinet postponed announcing the categories of men in the draft who were to be allowed to remain in New Zealand and thus warning those who were to return to the **Middle East**. A decision had in fact already been made, for **Freyberg** was told on 29 August that War Cabinet had decided that, with the exception of essential personnel, all married men with children, all men of 41 or over and all Maoris would be allowed to return to civil life if they so wished, and others could appeal if they had special reasons for release. It was expected that this decision plus medical boarding might reduce the draft by 1500–2000 men. Announcement of it was withheld so that **Freyberg** could comment. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Transcript of speech from shorthand notes, filed in Prime Minister's office.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 253.

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replied on 1 September saying that some such reduction in the size of the draft had been anticipated, but the announcement was not made until 1 October, six days after the election. This delay made impossible the departure of the draft at the end of October as had been planned, and on 10 September Freyberg was advised that the Government had directed that sailing be postponed until 20 November.

Fraser's announcement on the future of the draft was followed by some critical comment in the press, mainly in the form of anonymous letters in correspondence columns. A member of the Auckland Armed Forces Appeal Board was reported as saying that he was going to recommend that every man who appealed be allowed to remain in New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> The Government, with good cause, became alarmed about the situation that had developed. A cabinet minister noted that 'there would be a breakdown of morale if this grew into any continuous agitation.' Accordingly, on 21 October Mr Paul reimposed the ban on press reference to the furlough draft.

After the initial postponement from the New Zealand side it proved impossible to obtain a troopship at the date required, and it was not until the beginning of January 1944 that the furlough men were summoned back to camp. By this time there had been considerable development of opinion among the men and their civilian supporters. Only 1637 still remained in the draft, for the quite unexpectedly large number of 2664 had been down-graded on medical grounds; the explanation may well have lain largely in the desire to give the benefit of even a faint medical doubt in cases where a man obviously did not wish to return to the Middle East. When the summons came to the men

still remaining in the draft, many failed to report at all, or reported too late, or reported and refused to embark. In this they were in a number of cases publicly supported. At various towns in the **Auckland** province members of the draft assembled at railway stations to persuade those who were returning to camp to leave the trains. In Hamilton, in particular, the men were well organised and strongly supported by public opinion. A prominent citizen was arrested and admitted preparing propaganda for the furlough men. He was prosecuted under the Public Safety Regulations but acquitted in the Supreme Court, **Wanganui**, on 22 May as the jury did not consider the documents involved subversion. An odd echo of the doings at **Hamilton** came back from **Europe** on 5 May when a Radio Paris <sup>2</sup> broadcast reported that 'There has been a mutiny among the troops due to embark

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 21 Oct 1943.

<sup>2</sup> **Paris**, of course, was still in German hands.

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for the European front from Hamilton. A state of siege has been proclaimed in the town. <sup>1</sup> Actually, of 1637 ordered to return to the **Middle East**, 123 were kept back because their wives were pregnant, and 663 sailed with the 11th Reinforcements on 12 January.

The problem of what to do next illustrated the limitations of authority in a country not under immediate threat of attack, where governments have been for generations nicely sensitive to public opinion and wedded to a humanitarian outlook. The furlough men who refused to embark were tried by court martial for desertion and sentenced, not to be shot, but to ninety days' detention, and all warrant officers and non-commissioned officers among them were reduced to the ranks. The detention was, however, suspended in the meantime and offenders were advised that they would not be committed if they embarked with the next draft. There was a demonstration in the streets of **Christchurch** by furlough defaulters, and an interview was arranged on 26 February

between War Cabinet, together with two other ministers and the Adjutant-General on one hand, and the six representatives of the recalcitrant furlough men on the other. The interview was lengthy and amicable, and the Prime Minister in particular replied in quite conciliatory terms to the men's statement of grievances, which rested very largely on the inequality of sacrifice between themselves and fit men held on appeal in industry. War Cabinet later gave a definite promise that the notes of convictions for desertion would be expunged from the records of men embarking, and that 5 per cent of the men were to be returned to industry, their places in the Army being filled by Grade I single men then in industry.

On 31 March 125 of the furlough men sailed, but the great majority of those still liable for service again refused to embark; the men at **Trentham** expressed themselves both in flamboyant threats and in an orderly mass deputation, which told ministers plainly that they would not return overseas until fit men held on appeal had served. In this, it appeared, they had considerable support in public sentiment,<sup>2</sup> though no news was published or public discussion permitted.

On 5 April the Court of Appeal delivered a judgment quashing the earlier sentences for desertion, but pointed out that the men could be tried for other military offences, including insubordination and possibly even mutiny. War Cabinet immediately decided that all furlough men who had twice refused orders to embark would be dismissed for misconduct and lose all their privileges—that is payment of mufti allowance, discharge privilege leave on pay,

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<sup>1</sup> Director of Publicity to editors, 21 Jun 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Puttick to **Freyberg**, 5 Apr 1944.— *Documents*, II, p. 347.

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deferred pay, rehabilitation benefits and any gratuity that might be granted after the war. It was also decided that they should not be eligible



for appointment or re-appointment to any government department, but were liable for direction to essential industry. As a result of legal difficulties War Cabinet later rescinded its decision to withhold mufti allowance and deferred pay.

On 10 February 1900 men of the second furlough draft arrived in New Zealand. About 1100 of these were medically down-graded and others eliminated in other ways; but about 450 were required to embark for the **Middle East** at the end of June, and over 100 refused to do so. Court-martial proceedings were not taken against them, but their cases were investigated by a committee of officers to whom they were required to show cause why they should not be dismissed.

By a *Gazette* of 20 June, 432 furlough men were dismissed, and on 26 July 110 more. Such publication was a necessary part in the procedure of dismissing men from the forces, so this degree of publicity could not be avoided. The Director of Publicity, however, conveyed to the press a request from War Cabinet to refrain from mentioning the matter so as to prevent further details about the incident reaching the enemy, and newspapers were instructed not to mention the activities of the furlough men nor the action taken against them. The facts, however, could not be entirely hidden, and there seems to have been a certain amount of feeling in both political parties (particularly the National Party) that the action taken against the men was too severe, and **Holland** wrote to the Prime Minister on more than one occasion urging greater leniency. Moreover, if severity of punishment were difficult to contemplate in 1944, when manpower difficulties were acute, it became increasingly out of key with the community's mood as the war more or less obviously approached its close. Various branches of the RSA, for example, began to urge that the cases of the dismissed furlough men should be reconsidered, and in June 1945 the press reported the decision of the annual RSA conference to admit them to membership. This announcement was contrary to the Director of Publicity's instructions, but it was not thought expedient to prosecute in view of the end of the war in **Germany**. Thereafter censorship on the matter



seems to have lapsed, and four days after the Japanese surrender the Prime Minister announced the cancellation of the dismissal notices and the restoration of all privileges to the dismissed men.

The Government's inability to get more than a portion of the first furlough draft back to the **Middle East** is a striking instance of the limited effectiveness of the impressive array of wartime powers which it had been given in law. As the CGS pointed out to the Government, the physical force to coerce the furlough men was, if it came to the point, not available; and against a group which was popularly felt to have a good case the legal right to coerce became unreal. No one could well deny that any country which accepted the principle that soldiers could retire on their own initiative after three years' service would be withdrawing itself from effective participation in the war. On the other hand, any civilian might feel distinctly uneasy in forcing men to return to dangers from which he himself had been sheltered throughout. Cabinet ministers who had emphasised on so many occasions the inestimable debt owed by the country to the men who had fought in **Greece** and **Crete** and North Africa found it difficult to treat some of these men as criminals when they argued that what was inestimable was also sufficient. The situation was indeed morally awkward, as was the case with so many other wartime problems. The fact remained, however, that when it came to the point no prominent politician of either party argued that principle should be intransigently upheld and the law take its course against the furlough men. Further, it was evident that public opinion was in a state not only to appreciate but to exaggerate the force of the men's case for their release from the Army, and to give less weight than at any previous time since September 1939 to the Government's argument that the efficiency of the national effort must be maintained at all costs.

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It was a remarkable development that, with the war far from won, men could be released on furlough from a division fighting in the **Middle**

**East, brought half-way round the world, and then allowed, if sufficiently determined, to return to civilian life. The story which was worked out during the best part of a year from the return of the first draft in July 1943 did not necessarily show that New Zealand was fighting in 1943 and 1944 with less efficiency than in the critical year of 1942, nor that her determination to see the fight through to the end had declined. It did, however, illustrate certain characteristics of New Zealand's life and politics, and also some important changes in the attitudes of New Zealand citizens when the shape of the crisis changed from an evident military threat to the necessity for hard thinking and hard work. A further illustration is provided by the controversies which, during roughly the same period, attended the activities of J. T. Paul as Director of Censorship and Publicity. Both the extended use of censorship in 1943, and the criticism with which this use was met in 1943 and 1944, illustrated the increased restiveness of public opinion in the second half of the war.**

**Two of the three most controversial employments of censorship powers in 1943 arose from discontent in the police force. About the end of 1942 there was considerable dissatisfaction in the force over rates of pay. The press, including the *Police Journal*, organ of the Police Association, was forbidden to make any reference to the subject. <sup>1</sup> In his speech in the Address-in-Reply debate in March the Leader of the Opposition complained of the censorship of the *Police Journal*, and Fraser in his reply stated that he personally took responsibility for the ban. In wartime, he said, agitation could not be tolerated in the police force, which was as much a part of the defence of the country as were the armed services. <sup>2</sup> Again in November 1943 there was criticism both within and without the police force of amendments to the Police Force Regulations which forbade policemen or their wives to engage in outside work without the approval of the Commissioner of Police. <sup>3</sup> On 17 November Mr Paul warned editors against publishing 'any statement or resolution containing any direct or indirect reference' to this matter without his approval.**

Another censorship telegram sent out in November was in the form of a request. It arose from threats by **West Coast** timber workers to strike unless their butter ration was increased from 8 ounces to one pound a week, and from statements such as that by the secretary of their union that ‘I have not known any Government in this country that could fool all the workers all the time into believing that strikes or threats of strikes have not compelled Governments to act <sup>4</sup>.’ Paul asked editors to eliminate ‘from all press matter....any suggestions that only by striking or threatening to strike can persons or bodies of persons with legitimate grievances obtain redress.’ Such statements, he wrote, tended to ‘result in unlawful action and to create widespread dissatisfaction prejudicially affecting national morale <sup>5</sup>.’ On 3 December he issued a further direction with wide implications: ‘without my previous written consent information is not to be published relating to any act of any person if such act amounts to a counselling or inciting of any person to commit an offence against any emergency regulations.’

This warning was perhaps a turning point in censorship admini-

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<sup>1</sup> Director of Publicity to editors, 5 Jan 1943.

<sup>2</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 324.

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Post*, 16 and 17 Nov 1943. Mr Paul explained to an editor that ‘The Commissioner of Police believes that employment in certain places would not be conducive to public confidence in the integrity of the Police Force. If wives were employed in certain places it would quickly be urged that the police were quite familiar with every irregularity or breach of the law which occurred in these establishments.’—Director of Publicity to Editor, *Hawera Star*, 6 May 1944. The Commissioner seems to have been concerned primarily with alleged breaches of the rationing regulations.

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Post*, 15 Nov 1943.

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. On 6 December 1943 the *Times of Palmerston North* published an attack on the system which was notable both in itself and for its consequences. 'New Zealand's war effort is hardly ever the prime consideration that moves the Director of Publicity to action,' it complained. 'What drives the gagging machine into top gear is a maternal solicitude for the Government.' The editorial continued:

On three occasions recently the gag has been applied. We may be committing a breach of the emergency regulations by making that statement for the peculiar technique which the Director of Publicity has developed, and which he uses with such persistency and so promiscuously, prevents the newspapers even from stating that they cannot publish certain news. Every communique issued from Publicity headquarters is marked 'Confidential' and readers must sometimes wonder why a 'blackout' suddenly descends just when a particular news story is developing to a climax that is of vital interest to the people of the Dominion—and particularly awkward for the Government.

There is an element of grim humour in the fact that all three recent cases of suppression concern the workers, for whose special interest the Government exists or claims to exist. The workers may or may not have genuine grievances. We are not concerned with that issue at the moment. What we are concerned with is whether the workers have or have not the right to air their grievances through the Press, which, no matter whether they admire it or not, is the only Dominion-wide medium through which their grievances can be aired.

**R. H. Billens**, the editor and publisher of the *Times*, was prosecuted under the Censorship and Publicity Regulations, and convicted in the Magistrates' Court, **Wanganui**, on 6 April 1944, but the conviction was quashed by a majority judgment of the Court of Appeal on 11 August.

The fine points of interpretation of Regulation 16 (5 (b)) on which the decision turned are of less historical interest than the view expressed by **Mr Justice Northcroft** and **Mr Justice Johnston** that the three directives criticised in the editorial were themselves invalid, since the Director of Publicity could not in good faith hold the opinion that information on the subjects mentioned endangered public safety. As **Mr Justice Northcroft** put it, the regulations contained various anomalies and were difficult to interpret. While they should not be given a narrow interpretation to the prejudice of the public safety, yet they 'are not to be given such a construction as will interfere, without regard for public safety, with the customary freedom of discussion of matters of general interest to the community. If this was intended as one of the functions of the regulations, then it should have been stated in clear and unequivocal language <sup>1</sup>.' The Chief Justice, Sir Michael Myers, did not agree with his brother judges in their interpretation of

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<sup>1</sup> *NZ Law Reports*, 1944, p. 735.

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Regulation 16 (5 (b)) and did not commit himself either way on the validity of the three directives. <sup>1</sup>

The doctrine that the opinion of the Director of Publicity was examinable by the Courts could presumably have been overcome by fresh regulations if the Government had desired to continue the 'morale' censorship as it had developed in 1942 and 1943, and had felt this course would not produce excessive public indignation. It did not, however, take any such action, and this type of censorship was not enforced in 1944, unless indeed suppression of news about the furlough draft falls into this category. Government spokesmen attributed this welcome relaxation to the improvement of the war situation, but the outspokenness of the *Times* may have played its part in precipitating the change.

None the less, New Zealand press censorship continued to come under fire during 1944. Both the Associated Chambers of Commerce and

**the Newspaper Proprietors' Association pressed unsuccessfully for an amendment to the regulations similar to that made in [Australia](#) on 18 May 1944 after a clash between the censorship and the press in that country. This restricted censorship exclusively to 'defence security', made some effort to define the term and provided specifically that 'Censorship shall not be imposed merely for the maintenance of morale or the prevention of despondency or alarm' nor 'prevent the reporting of industrial disputes or stoppages.' Similarly a visit of a party of New Zealand editors to England early in 1944 was followed by an argument between some of them and the Director of Publicity over the relative liberality of British and New Zealand censorship. The argument was long and complicated, but whatever the rights and wrongs of all the points raised in it there can be no doubt that in two important respects the New Zealand censorship was more drastic than that of the [United Kingdom](#). British practice was not to censor matter published within the country except for reasons of defence security, and even in that field the censors' communications were merely warnings that publication of certain matters would be an offence against the Regulations. A prosecution would have to prove a breach of those Regulations and not merely a disregard of the censor's advice. <sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> **The Chief Justice's dissenting judgment concluded: 'The offence lies in the mere publication of the statement or indication, and the invalidity of the directives, if they be invalid, is, it seems to me, no defence. The appellant, if he wished to test the action of the Director of Publicity in respect of the "directives" in question, could have published information on the prohibited matters, and then, on a prosecution under Regulation 15, made his defence of the invalidity of the directives. He did not take that course. What he did was to publish a statement or indication which, in my opinion, comes within the prohibition of Reg. 16 (5(b)), and, on a prosecution under that regulation, the defence which he might have made to a charge under Reg. 15 is not open to him.**

**'In the result, I am of opinion that there has been a breach of the regulation and that the appeal should be dismissed.'— NZ**

<sup>2</sup> Williams, *Press, Parliament and People*, pp. 15–20.

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The differing attitudes towards censorship were illustrated at the time of the furlough draft when the British Chief Press Censor wrote to the New Zealand High Commissioner that ‘I have...instructed the Censors to inform me if any story is submitted on the subject, as I would have to try and use persuasion rather than the blue pencil. Unfortunately, we have no powers to censor news merely because it affords, or might afford, material for enemy propaganda <sup>1</sup>.’ A similar response was given on occasions when New Zealand made representations about news stories coming out of **Britain** which were considered bad for morale in this country. Thus on 14 November 1940 Fraser drew the British Government's attention to a message which reported that uneasiness was discernible in **Britain** regarding “failure to unite the nation for total war, lack of aggressive spirit, weak administration by some Ministers, undue optimism regarding production, failure to grapple with shipping losses, and slacking by dockers.” Fraser felt strongly ‘that such criticisms (which he would not have allowed to be released here had his attention been drawn to them before publication) will have a very bad effect in New Zealand and he cannot understand why they were allowed to pass the **United Kingdom** censorship authorities <sup>2</sup>.’ He received a typical reply from Churchill that ‘We dwell under a drizzle of carping criticism from a few members and from writers in certain [sections] of the Press. This has an irritating effect and would not be tolerated in any other country exposed to our present stresses. On the other hand, it is a good thing that any Government should be kept [alert?] and made aware of any shortcomings in time to remedy them. You must not suppose everything is perfect, but we are all trying our best, and the war effort is enormous and morale admirable... <sup>3</sup>.’ However, in March 1942 the **United Kingdom** introduced a censorship of outgoing messages which were thought likely to give a distorted picture of events in that country. This seems to have resulted



mainly from the reports of the British High Commissioner in **Australia** on the effects which some of these messages were having on morale there. <sup>4</sup>

New Zealand press censorship was, then, relatively drastic and was criticised accordingly. The historian reads, therefore, of the Director of Publicity's difficulties, rather than of his successes. It must, however, be remembered that the system could not have continued at all if head-on conflicts had not been the exception, and the rule a moderately cheerful system of give and take. At the

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<sup>1</sup> Official Secretary NZHC to Secretary for External Affairs, 14 Jan 1944.

<sup>2</sup> GGNZ to SSSA, 14 Nov 1940.

<sup>3</sup> PM UK to GGNZ, 18 Nov 1940.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, pp. 64–5.

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increasingly infrequent conferences of editors, <sup>1</sup> the records would seem to show a frank and friendly interchange of views between government spokesmen and their editorial questioners. The Director of Publicity at various times expressed his gratitude to the press as a whole for its willingness to co-operate with him. 'Some day,' he said in March 1944, 'the full story of helpful co-operation between the New Zealand press and censorship will be told <sup>2</sup>.'

Good personal relations, in fact, often softened the asperities of the censorship administration. Nevertheless the whole story of press censorship, like that of policy towards dissident minorities, illustrates the comparative weakness in New Zealand of that stubborn regard for individual liberty in times of adversity that persisted in England. Direct responsibility for public policy must rest with Fraser. Indeed, it reflects



at times his impatience and even lack of scruple when dealing with the disaffected. Yet its causes were deeper than any personalities of the wartime years, as is shown by parallel events during the depression years and during the First World War. The reasons for a certain divergence between New Zealand and British practice lie outside the scope of this history. The question suggests itself, however, of the relation between the British devotion to individual rights and the general British concept of an ordered society. This concept had been weakened—or at least significantly modified—in New Zealand—as indeed it was also being modified in the parent country. Maybe progress towards equality meant less rather than more freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Two in 1940, two in 1941, one in 1943, and one in 1945.

<sup>2</sup> *Christchurch Press*, 9 Mar 1944.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 20 – FOOD OR FIGHTING MEN?

## CHAPTER 20

### *Food or Fighting Men?*

IN November 1942 the **New Zealand Government** realised, and told Churchill, that the Dominion had not the manpower to maintain two divisions overseas and still keep up production. <sup>1</sup> In November 1943 she had 76,000 men overseas <sup>2</sup> and the need for her products and services was greater than ever. At intervals during the year the fact was frankly stressed that the position was impossible; yet the arguments against withdrawing either division or cutting production seemed unanswerable. Nevertheless, that which is impossible cannot continue indefinitely. War Cabinet well understood that a drastic decision had to be taken early in 1944, and set about ensuring that it should be, so far as possible, on lines approved by New Zealand's British and American friends.

In late 1943 and early 1944 there is perceptible a change in the British estimate of the best way in which New Zealand could help the Allied cause: from the British point of view there was less need for soldiers and more need for food than ever before. The mobilisation and training of the new American armies made the presence or absence of any one division, even a very good one, of less moment than formerly. Moreover, the character of the war in the **Mediterranean** area had changed. A slow advance up the Italian peninsula was replacing the desert war, where the New Zealand Division's specialised experience as a mobile force had given it an importance out of all proportion to its size. In August 1943, before the Division moved to **Italy**, **General Freyberg** told the Minister of Defence that 'There are now many divisions trained to carry out the initial landings, but we are the only British division equipped, trained and experienced for outflanking operations <sup>3</sup>.' But the opportunity for such operations did not present itself in **Italy**, and in January 1944 Churchill could write: 'I have always wanted the New Zealand Division to take part in the Battle of Rome, more as a symbol than because we cannot find other troops <sup>4</sup>.' This change in the military situation explains the difficulty which the **New Zealand Government** experienced at the beginning of 1944 (in contrast with

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<sup>1</sup> Above,

<sup>2</sup> See A to J, 1948, H-19B, for detailed figures.

<sup>3</sup> Documents, II, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill, Vol. V, p. 601.

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1942 and 1943) in getting a definite answer from the British and the Americans as to which division they should withdraw. The British Chiefs of Staff, later in 1944, were obviously extremely loth to part with 2 Division, but their arguments were not so compulsive.

As the need for New Zealand's army somewhat decreased, her primary industries faced demands which they were in no condition to meet. During 1942 not only had farming been handicapped by shortages of manpower and material but it had been 'found necessary to plan production not on what could be produced or what **Britain** desired to be produced, but on what could be shipped within any given period <sup>1</sup>.' The dairying industry was further harassed by changes of target. In the early stages the British Government asked for more cheese and less butter. Great efforts were made to comply with this request, and in the 1941-42 season cheese production was up to 157,400 tons and butter down to 135,900 tons as compared with corresponding figures of 122,400 tons and 167,000 tons for the previous season. <sup>2</sup> In June 1942, however, the **United Kingdom** advised that 'Since we requested you to increase cheese supplies at expense of butter our fat position has been prejudiced by loss of raw materials margarine from **India** and **Far East** while unexpectedly heavy quantities of cheese are now available on short haul from **North America**.' Moreover, it was explained, if the shipping position deteriorated further New Zealand might find a surplus of butter easier to handle than a surplus of cheese. In these circumstances would New Zealand be able to contemplate a change from cheese back to butter? <sup>3</sup> The New Zealand Government agreed to do its best to make the change

in the 1942–43 season. Technical problems involved were a serious addition to the difficulties being faced by the industry, and in March 1943 New Zealand necessarily replied pessimistically to an inquiry from **London** as to the possibility of a general increase in milk products. However, the London Food Committee, which was from **London** as to the possibility of a general increase in milk products from the **Combined Food Board** in **Washington**, added a suggestion that butter rationing might be introduced in New Zealand. <sup>4</sup> The Government was willing, but delays resulted from the impending general election. Butter rationing was introduced on 28 October 1943. <sup>5</sup>

Meat production was well maintained during 1942, and since refrigerated shipping was short, dehydration and canning were

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<sup>1</sup> Agriculture Department narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> HC to PM NZ, 26 Jun 1942.

<sup>4</sup> HC to PM NZ, 13 Mar 1943.

<sup>5</sup> The allowance of 8 oz. per week was reduced to 6 oz. in June 1945. It was restored to 8 oz. in October 1949 and butter rationing was abolished in June 1950.

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necessary to avoid waste of meat. However, in April 1943 the British Government offered to purchase the entire exportable surplus of meat (as had been done for 1940–41, but not for 1941–42), and it was added further that ‘if anything could be done to increase this surplus by control of consumption in New Zealand, it would be very welcome to us <sup>1</sup>.’ The change in the **United Kingdom** attitude seems to have arisen from the American inability to fulfil an offer to supply 458,000 tons of meat under lend-lease. New Zealand did not at once take up the hint

about meat rationing, and it was put more bluntly in a cable of 15 November 1943. The Ministry of Food pointed out that the **United Kingdom** meat ration was in danger unless the southern dominions greatly increased their supplies. It remarked that the level of meat consumption was higher in New Zealand and **Australia** than in the **United States**. **Australia** proposed to introduce meat rationing in January 1944, said the British message, and ‘we think that the **United States** will undoubtedly expect the deficiency on prospective supplies required to maintain the low **United Kingdom** consumption to be made up in the first instance by a contribution from New Zealand.’ War Cabinet decided on 13 December 1943 to introduce meat rationing and it came into force in March 1944.

During 1943, then, there was steady pressure on the Dominion to send more food, and in January 1944 the anxiety being felt in **London** was forcefully conveyed to the **New Zealand Government**. The Ministry of Food explained that there was reason to fear that production in the Dominion might decline further. Supplies from the **United States** were uncertain, as the scope of lend-lease might be cut down, and it was doubtful whether American domestic rationing would be effective. Moreover, the need for post-war relief was already looming up. The position, in short, was already so serious that—it was cautiously suggested—New Zealand should frankly consider taking men out of the Army to increase the flow of supplies, even perhaps to the extent that her war effort should ‘switch over to food production <sup>2</sup>.’ Shortly afterwards Walter Nash visited **London** to discuss the future of New Zealand's military plans, and the desperate need for food was officially pressed upon him. ‘If New Zealand's production declines below the present level,’ wrote the Minister of Food on 18 February 1944, ‘I do not see how we can possibly maintain our present standards of feeding in this country.... The particular foods which New Zealand sends us are those of which we are most now in need. It is in livestock products that we have suffered our most serious reductions over

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<sup>1</sup> UK Ministry of Food to NZHC, 19 Apr 1943.



pre-war consumption levels and my scientific advisers tell me that our consumption of animal protein foods is now as low as it can safely be.' The New Zealand contribution to the **United Kingdom** meat supply was important, but in the case of dairy produce the **United Kingdom** was dependent on New Zealand produce to an 'overwhelming' extent. 'To maintain our present ration of two ounces per week we need to import in 1944 160,000 tons of butter. Of this quantity we are looking to New Zealand to provide 96,000 tons.' To maintain the three-ounce cheese ration 224,000 tons had to be imported, of which it was hoped that New Zealand would provide 85,000 tons.

There were overwhelming arguments here, if they had been needed, for a quite substantial cut in military commitments, and the Prime Minister had already made up his mind as to the essential first step. On 12 January he cabled to Nash in **Washington** that the manpower situation could not be allowed to drift further. There was no alternative, he said, but to withdraw one division as 'the previous suggestion put forward [by Churchill] that both divisions should be allowed gradually to diminish in size is to my mind insupportable <sup>1</sup>.' He asked Nash to consult the President and then to visit **London** for personal discussion with Churchill. Roosevelt personally favoured the retention of the **Pacific** division: 'he felt it would be better for us to be at the entry to **Tokyo** rather than at the entry to **Berlin** <sup>2</sup>.' Sir John Dill, head of the British Joint Staff Mission to **Washington**, expressed a similar view. <sup>3</sup> However, the American Chiefs of Staff insisted that the matter should be referred to Churchill, so that the Combined Chiefs of Staff could in turn judge it with knowledge of the British Government's considered opinion.

The highest authorities in **London** and **Washington** gave careful study to the problem, and the New Zealand War Cabinet could not make a final decision without knowing their views. Yet the new Parliament had been summoned for 22 February and the Government was

desperately anxious to have its policy defined in time. New Zealand judgment at first seemed to favour the return of the **Mediterranean** division in a few months' time. On 1 February Fraser cabled to Nash that 'If the Second Front is successfully launched and the campaign in **Italy** progresses satisfactorily, there is clearly a strong case for withdrawing the 2nd New Zealand Division from **Europe** altogether to enable us to sustain a full division in the **Pacific** and to maintain, and if possible increase, food production <sup>4</sup>.' As late as 27 February Nash recommended to Fraser

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329, note 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

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'that you consider notifying the **United Kingdom** that you wish the New Zealand Division (less a brigade made up of men whose first engagement was subsequent to the conclusion of the North African campaign) to leave **Europe** for return to New Zealand after the fall of Rome, or about 1 August next, whichever is the earlier date... <sup>1</sup>.' However, it was known that Churchill personally favoured the retention of the Division in **Italy** until the fall of Rome—not, as has been seen, entirely on the grounds of military necessity—and after the first discussion of the matter by War Cabinet on 16 February the Secretary to War Cabinet wrote that 'although no conclusions were reached I have a feeling that the pendulum tended to swing away from the **Pacific** and back to **Europe**.' On 19 February the Chief of the General Staff, General Puttick, presented to the Prime Minister an 'appreciation' which thoroughly analysed the problem and concluded, after a careful balancing, with a recommendation that 2 Division be retained in **Italy**.

**Germany**, he argued, was both more dangerous and more vulnerable than **Japan** and the utmost possible concentration of force should be made against her to achieve her early defeat. The 3rd Division was not so essential to Allied operations in the **Pacific** as 2 Division was to those in the **Mediterranean**, the problems of finding shipping for the men returning from the **Pacific** would be much less acute and it was likely that they could be available in New Zealand many months earlier than could an equal number from the **Mediterranean**. These considerations, he felt, outweighed the possibility of adverse Australian or American reactions to the return of **3 Division** and the case for returning 2 Division because of its long fighting and heavy casualties. <sup>2</sup>

The arguments on which to base a decision were thus accumulating; but to its embarrassment the Government had to face a secret session of Parliament on 24 February without knowledge of the recommendations which the British Chiefs of Staff had drafted and sent for consideration to Washington. The secret session accordingly had to adjourn without reaching a decision, the Opposition voicing ‘strong criticism at waste of time owing to the Government’s inability to produce recommendations of Chiefs of Staff <sup>3</sup>.’ The Chiefs of Staff memorandum did not arrive till 29 February. It had been drafted by the British and supported without substantial qualification by the Americans, and it reached much the same conclusion as General Puttick. The Chiefs of Staff attached ‘great importance to the continued presence in **Italy** of New Zealand forces.’ No change in the constitution of the Division could be contemplated

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> See *Documents*, II, pp. 449–55 for full text.

<sup>3</sup> Fraser to Nash, 26 Feb 1944.

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until the fall of Rome, for which no exact date could be set: ‘thus there seems no possibility of the provision of the men required on the

farms in August by withdrawals from the European theatre.’ Not only were the operations in which **3 Division** was engaged of lesser importance but ‘it appears to us that the immediate need for the maintenance of this force may have diminished with the successful conclusion of the Solomon Islands campaign. The Pacific war is one in which the availability of land forces is not likely to be a governing factor.’ The two brigade groups should therefore be temporarily withdrawn. ‘This would enable New Zealand to tide over the period when labour demands are at their highest, namely from August to December. We may reasonably hope that developments in the European theatre will allow the later withdrawal of part or all of the New Zealand Division in time enough to constitute a complete division for further operations in the **Pacific** in 1945.’ It was hoped that at least one brigade would continue in the European theatre until the defeat of **Germany**. No reductions should be made in the Air Force or Navy. <sup>1</sup>

The suggestion that a New Zealand brigade should be left in **Europe** was made several times from **London**. It showed that the War Office still upon occasion failed to appreciate the status of dominion troops attached to a British army; and it was strongly opposed by both **Puttick** and **Freyberg**. **Puttick** pointed out that unless the brigade was completely absorbed into a British division it would have to maintain an uneconomically large structure of ancillary services. If it was completely absorbed, ‘Differences in administration, pay, discipline, standards of accommodation and treatment of men, would raise awkward problems, leading to friction, while the **New Zealand Government** would lose practically all control.’ Apart from this ‘the difference in fighting technique and the interdependence of brigades in battle may cause trouble and may well result in the NZ brigade being frequently in exposed forward positions, with a heavy increase in casualties.’ Even if the brigade was only tactically integrated with a British division, the **New Zealand Government** could not expect to exercise anything like the same degree of control over it as it did over a division, and if it did, ‘the brigade could only be regarded as a nuisance <sup>2</sup>.’ **Puttick** added that ‘British officers would not see anything like the same objections....to a

NZ brigade group being part of a British division.' **General Freyberg** later expressed similar views: 'In the last two months here on this front great firmness has been needed in dealing with the present most difficult tactical situation. In

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 341–3.

<sup>2</sup> CGS to PM, 29 Feb 1944.

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similar circumstances the commander of a small independent force is in an impossible position. Further, whenever a situation deteriorates there is a tendency to use independent brigade groups to stop gaps in the same way as the **Long Range Desert Group** was committed at **Leros** <sup>1</sup>.' Fraser warmly supported these views. <sup>2</sup>

The suggestion that the force in **Europe** might ultimately be reduced to a brigade, though it alarmed **Freyberg** enough to make him exercise his right of direct communication with the Prime Minister, was merely incidental to the main point, namely, that New Zealand's manpower problem should be relieved at the expense, for the time being, of the **Pacific** division. This conclusion was quickly accepted by the Government and its advisers. On 10 March Barrowclough was advised of the situation in terms that left no doubt in his mind that **3 Division** was to be withdrawn for the time being. He flew to New Zealand later in the month to discuss how the men required for industry could be supplied, while leaving some nucleus in the **Pacific** round which the division might be reconstituted in 1945. The number of men required for industry had been estimated at 17,650. Of these, 7000 were needed for the beginning of the production season in July, and the remainder at a rate of 2000 a month thereafter. Barrowclough proposed and War Cabinet on 25 March agreed that these men should be provided from **3 Division** until October. This would leave some 6000 men, which would be about the minimum for maintaining the cadres on which the division could be rebuilt. At that stage a decision about the future of **2 Division**

should be available. If it proved that the remaining men required for industry could not be made available from that division, then **3 Division** would have to disband altogether. Barrowclough criticised the British Chiefs of Staff for being unnecessarily vague in their reference to the future of 2 Division. If New Zealand was to make an economical use of her resources a decision on the point would have to be available soon and he could not see why it should not be made very shortly, when the Division came out of the **Cassino** fighting. He suggested that the Prime Minister take the matter up at an early stage of his forthcoming visit to **London**.

Once again, in fact, New Zealand had adopted an interim policy. A decision still had to be reached as to the date of 2 Division's ultimate withdrawal; and it was known that if that withdrawal were greatly delayed, **3 Division** would have to be 'completely liquidated'. In a message intended for the War Office, General Puttick reported War Cabinet's interim decision, and outlined the problem that remained. 'There will be strong general feeling,' he

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 346. See p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

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wrote, 'that 2 Division should return certainly after fall of Rome or earlier if that event unduly delayed. Prime Minister considers army participation in **Pacific** politically important in view Australian opinion and effect on NZ position in post-war **Pacific** discussions but recognises changing situations may change views from time to time. This is likely to be Cabinet's view and also Parliament's... <sup>1</sup>.' This forecast was correct. At the secret session of 31 March no formal resolution was passed, but no objection was expressed to the Government's proposals, which were based on the recommendations of the British Chiefs of Staff.

A week later Fraser left for **London** to attend a Prime Ministers'

conference, and to endeavour to obtain that decision on the future of 2 Division which was necessary before the allocation of the country's manpower could be planned on anything more than a month to month basis. In Washington, incidentally, he addressed a meeting of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate to answer criticism of **Australia**, and to a lesser extent, of New Zealand for withdrawing their fighting men from the **Pacific** war.

At the Prime Ministers' conference which took place in **London** between 1 and 16 May Fraser took an active and somewhat rebellious part. He closely questioned the strategy of the proposed offensive in **Italy**; and it does not appear from the report that the British service chiefs succeeded in convincing him that the plan was sound. At one stage Churchill observed that, pending the invasion of western **Europe**, it was necessary to strike in **Italy** 'and prevent the enemy drawing his forces away. We should not be handicapped now by lack of depth in the attack which, as General Wilson has explained, had been the cause of our lack of success in January.' Fraser intervened to say that 'some responsible persons were always adept at explaining failure away afterwards. General Wilson's explanation this time might be as weak and unconvincing as it had been after **Leros**,<sup>2</sup> when the totally unrelated and irrelevant matter of the after-results of **Greece** and **Crete** were quoted as justification for the attempt which ended so disastrously.' Fraser also disapproved of a suggestion by Smuts that more attention should be given to the opening of 'side-shows' in the **Balkans**—'He regarded the **Balkans** as a seething mass of factions, who would turn to whoever would give them the most support or hold out to them most hope for the future. He doubted if anything could be done in the **Balkans** which would compare at all with "Overlord", or our other major

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<sup>1</sup> Puttick to Park, 28 Mar 1944.

<sup>2</sup> The New Zealand squadron of the **Long Range Desert Group** (totalling 108 men) had been employed in operations in the **Dodecanese** in September and October 1943 without reference to



**General Freyberg.** Messages from Fraser in November 1943 had been sharply critical both of the general conduct of these operations and the failure to consult the **New Zealand Government** about the use of its troops in them. See *Documents*, II, pp. 308–27

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campaigns.’ However, neither the question of the withdrawal of 2 Division nor that of the participation of New Zealand in the **Pacific** was discussed at the conference.

Apparently it was agreed that a decision be postponed pending the result of the attack on Rome and Fraser's visit to the Division in **Italy**. In the last days of May and early June Fraser visited the men of the Division, and discussed the situation with **Freyberg**. He concluded that it was still impossible to make an immediate decision. ‘For the time being it seemed both unwise and inexpedient to withdraw the 2nd Division from the campaign while the Germans were being defeated and early victory seemed possible. Moreover, there was no possibility of obtaining shipping.’ As to long-term policy, ‘no decision could possibly be arrived at until he had seen the British and American Chiefs of Staff and was thus in a position to discuss the matter with War Cabinet on his return to **Wellington**.’

In short, in spite of the need for quick action to enable manpower planning to be intelligent, New Zealand's interim decision still stood: 2 Division to remain in **Europe** ‘meantime’; and the cadres of 3 Division to be maintained so that a **Pacific** force could be quickly reconstituted. This position could not continue, for it was tolerably clear that New Zealand had not the manpower to maintain even the cadres of 3 Division and at the same time reinforce 2 Division indefinitely. <sup>1</sup> One had to be sacrificed to the other; and the military arguments either way were not decisive. **Freyberg**'s view was summed up for Fraser in a report written just after the fall of Rome and the invasion of **France**. The Division had reached the stage, he wrote, where complete withdrawal or extensive replacement were the necessary alternatives if there should be a prospect of heavy fighting throughout 1945. ‘There is no doubt in my



mind that the high-water mark of our battle-worthiness was reached at **Sidi Rezegh** and **Belhamed** in November 1941. In that campaign, and in the other costly **Western Desert** battles which followed, many of our best men became casualties, and gradually the keen fighting edge of the Force was blunted. For a period the gradual reduction in offensive spirit was offset by the increased efficiency of the divisional machine and the ever-increasing battle experience of our commanders. Time has gone on. Another long campaign in **Italy** has followed. I know the great stress of battle which large numbers of men have been through, and we cannot disregard its effect, especially on battle-weary leaders. Signs are not lacking now that many of the old hands require a prolonged rest.' In view of New Zealand's manpower difficulties and probable future  
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<sup>1</sup> Given the existing naval and air commitments. In June the Navy strength was 10,321, the Army 63,672, and the Air Force 41,535.

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against **Japan** he felt 'that the time might well be opportune for the complete withdrawal of the 2nd NZEF.' Yet the involvement of the Division in the European theatre was not lessened by the invasion of **France**. If all went well on the Second Front it would be a pity to withdraw the Division when victory was in sight. On the other hand, if things went badly, it would be virtually impossible to weaken the front in face of German success. **Freyberg**, in short, recommended as a long-term objective that the Division should be withdrawn and reorganised for the war against **Japan**; but in the short run could only suggest that it be reinforced and kept fighting in **Europe** 'until the strategic situation becomes clearer <sup>1</sup>.'

The decision as to which of New Zealand's divisions should be preferred must turn, then, on the probable course of the fighting in **Europe**, but more crucially on the use likely to be made of a reorganised

New Zealand army in the war against **Japan**. If need be, other Allied troops could be provided in the European theatre, where after all New Zealand had made an unmistakably valuable contribution. On the other hand, if New Zealand troops could be effectively used in the **Pacific** area, the political arguments for supplying them would be conclusive. Fraser's hope on his return from **Italy** was therefore to find out from the British and American Chiefs of Staff what part they had in mind for New Zealand land forces in the **Pacific**. They could not tell him; and accordingly the negotiations were friendly, but inconclusive.

In June 1944 the matter was discussed with Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who was apparently prepared to consider the withdrawal of the Division. However, Fraser 'commented on the excellent spirit he found in the Division and on the undesirability of withdrawing the men from the battle at the present time when the enemy was in retreat and there was a prospect of the Division being in at the defeat of **Germany**.... Brooke expressed his pleasure at the prospect of the New Zealand troops remaining in the line for a while longer and agreed that decision would be given regarding a possible firm date of withdrawal within the next two months when the situation had stabilised and when plans for the formation of a British Force in the **Pacific** had been formulated.'

The plan in mind during this discussion was apparently that 2 Division should be withdrawn, say at the end of 1944, when the men who had seen relatively short service would be built on the cadres of 3 Division to form a new unit to fight in the **Pacific**. Shortly afterwards, indeed, a contrary plan was urged by General Puttick, Chief of the New Zealand General Staff, who was with

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 348–50.

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the Prime Minister in **London**. He placed before Sir Alan Brooke the considerations which, in his mind, favoured the retention of 2 Division in **Europe** until the end of the war with **Germany** and the disbandment

of the cadres of **3 Division**. 'The C.I.G.S.,' reported Puttick later, 'said he fully agreed and would warmly welcome a decision to leave the 2nd Division in **Europe**. As regards the 3rd Division, in view of the possibilities of rapid developments in the war against **Germany** and the constantly-changing strategical situation he thought it advisable, if the 2nd Division remained in **Europe**, to retain the cadres of the 3rd Division as long as possible, at least until the end of October. By that date, he said, clearer advice might be available in the light of the situation at the time.' There was, then, a certain confusion in the views exchanged in **London** between Brooke, Fraser and Puttick; but this confusion was probably more apparent than real. The British Chiefs of Staff preferred the Division to remain in **Europe**, but apparently would not argue against a New Zealand request for its withdrawal. The New Zealand Government was not inclined to make this request until it could get some picture of how a New Zealand division would be utilised in the war against **Japan**.

Action could not be delayed until the Chiefs of Staff could give a firm answer on this last point, and the interim policy decided upon in March was vigorously carried out. Soldiers were accordingly drawn back from the **Pacific** to New Zealand and placed on leave without pay to work on farms or in other industries to which they might be directed. It had been intended that the cadres of **3 Division** should be concentrated on **New Caledonia** to make easier its speedier re-establishment when the time came. In July, however, the Americans asked that **3 Division** be returned to New Zealand as they required for their own troops the accommodation it was using. In August, therefore, the main body of what remained of the division was shipped back to New Zealand and moved into **Papakura Camp**.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, steps were taken along the lines of **Freyberg's** advice, to reinforce 2 Division; in particular, it was decided in July to send 2000 men as replacements to **Italy** so as to enable the return of the 3200 remaining members of the 4th Reinforcements and still keep the Division up to battle strength until the end of the year.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly in view of previous experience, it was recognised that so far as participation in the fighting in **Europe** was

concerned the scheme would have to be one of replacement and not of furlough; <sup>3</sup> but that aspect of the matter was left vague in announcements, presumably with an eye

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<sup>1</sup> Gillespie, p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 350, 352–3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349–50.

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to the possible extension of the scheme and the requirements of the **Pacific** war.

These steps left the major decision still to make, and for a short time it seemed that the problem might solve itself by the sudden end of the war with **Germany**. In August a SHAEF intelligence summary spoke of the end of the war in **Europe** as being ‘within sight, almost within reach. The strength of the German Armies in the West has been shattered, **Paris** belongs to **France** again, and the Allied Armies are streaming towards the frontiers of the Reich <sup>1</sup>.’ In the same month Churchill said, ‘The progress of the war against **Germany** on all fronts has been such as to render possible the partial or total collapse of **Germany**, which might free forces from the European theatre in the coming months.’ **Freyberg**'s reports to his government showed the same optimism. On 28 June he wrote, ‘I feel most optimistic about the immediate prospects of an early victory over the German forces in the field and am anxious that New Zealand should be represented in the final phase to reap the full benefit of all their great sacrifices, but I realise that these are policy questions to be decided by the **New Zealand Government** <sup>2</sup>.’ Again on 21 August, ‘There can be no doubt that the finish of the war is only a matter of time.’ He went on to refer to a suggestion of General Alexander's that the New Zealand Division might be used after the war as a garrison in **Greece** for a short time—a proposal that War Cabinet refused to entertain. <sup>3</sup>

Before these hopes of an imminent German collapse were shown to be delusive, however, opinion both in **Britain** and New Zealand moved decisively against the notion of an early withdrawal of 2 Division. General Puttick's views had been expressed before, both in New Zealand and to Sir Alan Brooke. On 4 August they were again placed forcefully before the Government, with an additional important argument. He pointed out that the decision to recall 2 Division would withdraw all New Zealand land forces from the war while the Division was being shipped back and the new division established. 'From the time the decision is taken to raise a fresh division until its appearance on the battlefield, approximately 12 months would elapse. During this period, approximately 25,000 fighting men would be neither producing nor fighting.' This wastage would, of course, occur whenever it was decided to establish a new division, but he felt it better to postpone it until after the defeat of **Germany**, when indeed it might prove that a New Zealand division to fight against **Japan** was not required.

This last suggestion was in line with the thinking of the British

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<sup>1</sup> Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe*, p. 458. Cf. *Hopkins Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 809–10.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 354–5.

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Chiefs of Staff. There were clear indications that the Americans were none too anxious to have Commonwealth land—or even air—forces serving with them as the **Pacific** fighting moved northwards. They feared that which New Zealand and **Australia** hoped: that participation in the fighting would give the Dominions a claim to a voice in policy-making.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the British had hopes that victory over **Germany** might be followed by partial demobilisation.<sup>2</sup> In the recommendations from the British Chiefs of Staff on plans for the **Pacific** fighting,

therefore, land forces were not stressed. In their appreciation of the situation which reached New Zealand on 23 August, the Commonwealth's land, sea and air task force proposed in June ranked only as an alternative in the event of the Americans not wishing to accept the first choice, which was the provision of a British fleet; though **Britain**, of course, would also be committed in **Burma**, where it was proposed to launch an airborne and seaborne attack on **Rangoon**.<sup>3</sup>

This report by the Chiefs of Staff was closely followed by an appeal from Churchill, who had been visiting New Zealand troops in **Italy**—‘the Division is sorely needed in the forthcoming operations’<sup>4</sup>—and by a sharp reminder that the men still in **3 Division** were wasting their time. On 4 September the National Service Department pointed out that the further retention ‘of 6,000 men in camp in New Zealand without being usefully employed would bring difficulties, e.g., criticism of the waste of manpower involved and pressure for the release of these men to essential industry.’ At the same time a joint recommendation from Bockett, the Director of National Service, Barrowclough and Conway, the Adjutant-General, urged that the cadre force be disbanded and **2 Division** left in **Europe**.

From Fraser's point of view, the position was still obscure. As he somewhat testily explained to **Freyberg**, he could get nothing specific from the British Government as to ‘the nature and role of British Commonwealth forces in the war against **Japan**’, and therefore could make no estimate as to what part, if any, New Zealand land forces would play in the **Pacific** war.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, a further interim decision had to be made, which merely extended **2 Division's** period of service in **Europe**. On 9 September Fraser cabled to Churchill that ‘Any final decision has been made impracticable by this continued lack of certainty about the probable future use of our men and the rapidly changing circumstances in **Europe**. At this stage, however, we have come to the conclusion we should

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<sup>1</sup> NZ Minister, **Washington**, to PM, 17 May 1944. Wilmot,

p.642. Cf. McNeill, pp.401, 486.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Hopkins Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 806 ff.

<sup>3</sup> PM UK to PMs Aust. and NZ, 23 Aug 1944.

<sup>4</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 356, note 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

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decide that our Division in **Europe** should continue to be maintained and that its future should be reviewed at the close of the Italian campaign, and, further, that cadres of the 3rd ( **Pacific**) Division should therefore be disbanded and the men used as replacements and reinforcements for the 2nd Division. It will be appreciated that this course will necessarily delay the building up of another **Pacific** division should such a force be required <sup>1</sup>.'

This policy was endorsed by War Cabinet two days later; presumably substantial agreement though not formal decision had been reached when Fraser cabled Churchill. The War Cabinet decisions also included the introduction of a replacement scheme for long-service members of the Division.

On the problem of planning for the **Pacific** war, there was a division of opinion among War Cabinet's advisers. Some pressed for an immediate decision. In their paper of 5 September Bockett, Barrowclough and Conway recommended that 'after 2 N.Z. Div has finished its work in **Europe**, New Zealand should still maintain one active Division in the field until the defeat of **Japan**, or until it is decided that such a Division is no longer required in the war against **Japan**.' For this purpose men from 2 Division were to be used, except those who in October 1944 had two years' service abroad or who were over 36 years of age or who had more than two children. General Puttick on the contrary urged that



there was no adequate military reason for making a decision at this stage on this matter. 'I consider,' he wrote, that 'opinions and anticipations of the public and the men of the 2nd Division necessitate the withdrawal of the *whole* division, after the end of the war with **Germany**, and NOT only the men with more than 2 years' service. Otherwise, I am of opinion there is serious risk of indiscipline in the division and a heated public opinion in N.Z. affecting the troops.' War Cabinet followed Puttick's advice, and postponed decision on the participation of New Zealand land forces in the war against **Japan** until further information was received from the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

On this crucial decision on the disposition of the NZEF Parliament was not consulted, nor does it seem to have been given (or to have sought) an opportunity for discussion afterwards. An announcement containing the substance of the decisions of 11 September was made to Parliament on 21 September by the Prime Minister; though, perhaps characteristically, a decision reached locally was expressly attributed to overseas advice: 'As a result of the Quebec Conference, and of the advice just received from Mr Churchill, it is now possible to come to decisions regarding the

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 356–7.

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role of our Armed Forces in the remaining phases of the war against **Germany** and in the war against **Japan**, and for a decision to be made regarding the disposition of New Zealand land forces overseas <sup>1</sup>.' Actually the Quebec Conference opened on 11 September, the day that War Cabinet made its decisions; it finished on 16 September and the summary of its conclusions sent to Fraser by Churchill was dated 18 September. <sup>2</sup> However, advice from **Quebec** would certainly have confirmed War Cabinet in its policy. It was expressly agreed, for instance, 'that no major units shall be withdrawn from **Italy** until the outcome of General Alexander's offensive is known....' With regard to the **Pacific**, moreover, the Americans agreed to assistance by a British fleet,



so that the alternative suggestion for a combined force no longer arose.

It remained to operate the policy adopted, and in particular to carry out the replacement scheme which was associated with the plan to leave the Division in **Europe** indefinitely. Moreover, it soon became clear, in spite of the general optimism of August, that **Germany** was by no means on the point of collapse, and on 8 October **Freyberg** advised the Government that the Division should be reorganised during the winter months so as to be ready for possible fighting in the spring. Some 600 officers and 10,000 other ranks were affected by the replacement decision, but the Government offered no hope of getting the last batch of replacements away before mid-April. Even so the scheme, like most other schemes, did not function altogether as envisaged. The first batch of replacements (14th Reinforcements) was delayed by shortage of shipping from mid-November until 5 January 1945. Nor were the men available at the dates proposed for the 15th and 16th Reinforcements which were to complete the scheme. In spite of the withdrawal of New Zealand land forces in the **Pacific**, there were simply not enough men available to replace the long-service men in 2 Division without grave injury to the food production which all agreed was essential to the Allied war effort. On 18 December Fraser explained to **Freyberg** that the delay in supplying the promised reinforcements 'has been caused mainly by the fact that owing to their employment in the production of essential foodstuffs, which is now at the height of the season, 3rd Division personnel temporarily released to industry have not been returned to the Army on the dates expected. Difficulty is also being experienced in obtaining the release of men held on appeal, the majority of whom are also employed in primary industries <sup>3</sup>.' Next month the Director of National Service wrote <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 266, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 361, note 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>4</sup> To Minister of National Service, 25 Jan 1945.

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that 'The general manpower situation as 1945 commences is more difficult than it has been at any stage of the war.' At this time the country's last reserve of military manpower was the group of 32,483 men, who lacked three years' overseas service but were held in essential industry, 11,874 of them in farming; and the problem was to get them into the Army without disrupting industry. On 1 February Cabinet decided to accelerate the comb-out of fit men from industry and to issue the drastic instruction to Appeal Boards that 20 per cent of the appeals reviewed in all industries except sawmilling and coalmining must be dismissed without qualification.

The replacement scheme, in short, met with considerable difficulties, and the second batch of replacements—the 15th Reinforcements—did not reach the **Mediterranean** till after the German surrender. Nevertheless, the scheme's main objects were achieved. A draft of 6300 men left **Italy** in February, completing the relief of long-service men, up to and including the 5th Reinforcements; <sup>1</sup> yet when the Division went into action in April it was up to strength and **Freyberg** wrote that it had 'never been in better condition <sup>2</sup>.' This maintenance of the Division in fighting strength was achieved without drastic results to essential industry. By the sacrifice, admittedly grievous, of its land forces in the **Pacific** war, New Zealand had achieved, if by a narrow margin, the other main objectives of national policy: the maintenance of food production at home and of one overseas division in first-class condition, backed by substantial participation in the **Pacific** through the Air Force and Navy. Nor was domestic life in New Zealand too gravely dislocated.

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 393.



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**CHAPTER 21 – THE POLITICS OF FIGHTING JAPAN**

## CHAPTER 21

### *The Politics of Fighting Japan*

**THE** decision to leave 2 Division in **Europe** till the defeat of **Germany** shelved the problem of New Zealand's part in the anticipated long war against **Japan**. It did not solve her manpower difficulties, and certainly did not diminish the political importance of this mingled domestic and military conundrum. Indeed, the last months of hostilities produced vigorous controversy and threw unusual light on some aspects of New Zealand politics.

Towards the end of 1944 it seemed likely that New Zealand land forces would not be needed in the **Pacific** war, in which case the victory over **Germany** might bring comparatively quick relief. In January 1945, however, General Barrowclough discussed matters in **London** and reported a somewhat different prospect. The War Office, in fact, expected a manpower crisis at the end of the war in **Europe**. 'Considerable forces required for army of occupation coupled with proposed repatriation of British long-service men and demands of industry will make it difficult to assemble forces in **Far East** on scale desired.' The intention at this time was for the Australians to serve under MacArthur in the **Philippines**. General Barrowclough was told that it would not be practicable for the New Zealanders to serve with them. The British Government, however, would gratefully accept a New Zealand division if it were offered for service under British command in **Burma** or **Malaya**. The same line of thinking was shortly afterwards expressed by Churchill to Fraser. He explained that the despatch of the New Zealand Division to operate in South-east **Asia** under Admiral Mountbatten would be a contribution of the first order. On the other hand, he wrote, 'we do not know yet what tasks the United States Chiefs of Staff will allot to the Australian forces after the completion of the **Philippines** campaign, nor of the role which they would assign to a New Zealand Division if it were placed under American command. I hope, therefore,' he concluded, 'that when you have had an opportunity to weigh carefully the factors involved, you will decide once again to keep

**your Division alongside ours to the end. Anyhow, God bless you all <sup>1</sup>.'**

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**<sup>1</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 27 Jan 1945.**

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**British thinking had accordingly swung over to the view that a New Zealand land division could well be used in the war against **Japan**, though fighting under British command. In view of the known opinions of the Australians and of the United States Government, however, there were substantial political reasons against the adoption of Churchill's recommendation of South-east **Asia**. Further, **General Freyberg**, whose advice was always highly valued by the **New Zealand Government**, had on 19 February expressed the opinion that by serving with the Australian troops under American command against the main Japanese army in **China** or in **Japan** itself, the New Zealand Division would be making the most effective contribution from the purely military point of view and that it would, at the same time, be 'serving national as well as Allied interests <sup>1</sup>.' There was, moreover, another point of some importance. If the men of 2 Division were to be withdrawn for service in the **Pacific** area under American command with the Australians, the obvious plan would be to bring them back to New Zealand for reorganisation. If, on the other hand, they were to be used in South-east **Asia**, then the best plan, militarily speaking, would be to send them to Egypt to be reorganised for their new period of service. **Freyberg** evidently feared that there would be considerable disappointment among the men of the Division if this were done. He cautiously expressed the opinion, nevertheless, that the decision would be accepted 'provided the Government's policy, including the replacement scheme, is announced to the troops before the end of the war in **Europe** <sup>2</sup>.'**

**By this time, however, it was by no means clear that New Zealand had enough fit men to maintain even one division in active service and still keep up the substantial air force which was her main contribution to the **Pacific** war. In February the National Service Department bluntly recommended to the contrary. It argued that the Army's capital**

reinforcement and replacement requirements could not be met during 1945 without eliminating the Air Force; that the contributions being made by the Air Force must be maintained; and that, accordingly, the army division must 'be repatriated on the defeat of **Germany**.' The Army naturally reacted sharply to this advice. It pointed out that there had been considerable demobilisation since 1942 and that, accordingly, 'there *must* be a large number of men capable of replacing some of the personnel held on appeal.' It maintained stoutly that 'it was wrong to approach

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 389–93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p 393.

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the problem on the assumption, as the Director of National Service apparently did, that if some part of our military effort was to be curtailed then this must be the Army.' However, it began reluctantly to consider what use could be made of a division of less than full strength, and of men in older age groups or with less than first-class medical grading.

These discussions among its expert advisers led War Cabinet, as was to be expected, into the usual compromise decision. On the political side the attitude both of the domestic cabinet and of War Cabinet was clear. 'In view of our position as a **Pacific** nation, the need for maintaining our relations with the **United States of America** on the friendliest terms and firmest basis and the declarations made in the Canberra Agreement', the fullest possible contribution of armed forces should be made to the war against **Japan**. As to/the form of that contribution, War Cabinet proposed in April to maintain the air effort at nineteen squadrons. To this was to be added a land force of 15,000; that is, a division of two brigades plus ancillaries. Annual reinforcements of 5000 would be needed; there would be no difficulty, thought War Cabinet, in finding them in 1946, but trouble might arise in 1947. As to the location of this



force, War Cabinet begged the question. 'Our preference is that force function under British command in Southeast Asia or with the Australians <sup>1</sup>.'

This general line of thinking was approved in May by the high authority of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He expressly accepted the political argument. New Zealand had been one of the countries closely threatened by the Japanese advance. She was vitally interested in **Japan** and it would be fitting if she were to take part in the operations against that country. He accepted, too, the necessity for a drastic reduction in the size of the Division. Even if it were 'reduced to two-brigade strength and backed by reasonable administrative tail,' he wrote, it 'could be used most effectively against the Japanese in the South-east Asia Command, and possibly later as part of a British Empire force against **Japan**. It would be an advantage if it could be reorganized in the **Middle East** and moved thence to its new operational area <sup>2</sup>.'

With this advice before it, War Cabinet in June 1945 framed its future policy with reasonable clarity. It could see little prospect of being able to provide a land force of more than fifteen or sixteen

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to PM, 7 Apr 1945.

<sup>2</sup> NZHC to PM, 21 May 1945.

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thousand men. <sup>1</sup> It was fully conscious of the disadvantages of a two-brigade division which **General Freyberg** and others emphasised, yet the manpower shortage was so acute that this was quite clearly the maximum force that could be provided. As to the area in which it should serve, War Cabinet was evidently inclined to accept the British suggestion of South-east **Asia**. One important reservation was made, however. New Zealand preferred that her forces should not be used in **Burma** on the ground that this might lead to political repercussions in the country. <sup>2</sup> The fear was clearly that operations against the Japanese

might merge into a war to maintain British authority against Burmese nationalists, many of whom, indeed, had been collaborating with the Japanese. It was, incidentally, a political argument of this character which led New Zealand in the days before the war to reject British suggestions that New Zealanders should be used to strengthen the peacetime garrison of **Singapore**.

At this stage a new development took place. For the first time the disposition of New Zealand's armed forces became the subject of vigorous public controversy. Relaxed tension both in **Europe** and in the **Pacific** seemed to permit freer discussion than ever before. Moreover, the matter was raised in a form particularly likely to rouse widespread interest and launch discussion from an angle unfavourable to the Government. On the one hand, decision on the use of New Zealand's land forces in the **Pacific** was linked with a problem which was in everyone's mind, and in respect of which policy intimately touched the lives of most citizens. This was the crisis in manpower, which was brought home not only to those liable to conscription, but (through direction of labour, rationing, and shortages in general) to the community as a whole. Again, since the specific question concerned large-scale participation in **Pacific** warfare, questions were raised to which conventional answers were not available. The Japanese were now far from New Zealand, and the argument was no longer one of physical survival but of calculation: that New Zealand should earn the right to participate in the peace settlement by full military participation in the area where her destiny was cast. It may be doubted whether such reasoning—in essence that New Zealand was a **Pacific** country and should

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to **Freyberg**, 9 Jun 1945. Nash to Fraser, 9 Jun 1945, gives reasons why War Cabinet decided not to cut down the air effort. 'Although the Air organisation is considerable in numbers Isitt says that no material assistance can be given to Army unless the whole **Pacific** organisation were disbanded. Disbandment of Air would yield about 6,000 men but they could not be provided immediately since it would be necessary to get formal agreement of Combined Chiefs of Staff to release of our

**Squadrons and this would take some time. Moreover there would be serious organisational difficulties with certain of these men since they hold rank in the Air Force which they must necessarily drop in any new force. In any case Air Force seems to be needed and to be reasonably well employed.' At this time the strength of the **RNZAF** was 21,146 in New Zealand (including 2176 women) and 7829 in the **Pacific**.**

<sup>2</sup> Nash to **Freyberg**, 21 Jun 1945.

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**act accordingly, if necessary under American leadership—had made much impact on the Labour Party outside its responsible leadership. It is still more doubtful whether it could command much sympathy in the National Party—more particularly in the farming community.**

**The despatch of ground forces for service in the **Pacific** was, then, not a proposition likely to be popular in the circumstances of 1945, quite apart from certain overtones, which were important even if their assessment must remain a matter of speculation. There was at least in some quarters a revulsion against jungle fighting, a fear of tropical diseases, and a feeling that Germans and Italians were preferable enemies to the Japanese. There was some resentment against American influence over New Zealand life; and, after all, a high proportion of New Zealand men had been overseas for three years and more. The Pacific war, moreover, had the aspect of a new demand for unlimited effort without the stimulus of visible danger—a demand which accordingly released pent-up war weariness. In short, on this whole issue, opinion appeared to be lagging behind leadership, and the result was a full-blooded political discussion during which some of the deeper currents in New Zealand's politics and thinking, normally hidden, were brought spectacularly to the surface. Moreover, the restraining personal influence of the Prime Minister was removed by his attendance at the **San Francisco** conference. This had the accidental result that information on the whole incident was unusually full. To voluminous press reports can be added the detailed comments sent by Walter Nash as acting Prime Minister to his absent chief.**

**‘Throughout April and May,’ reported Nash to Fraser, ‘there was increasing public demand for a clear statement of manpower objectives. This was linked by farmers and other sections of the community with the need for additional skilled labour for farms and a desire to know the character and extent of our future military commitments.’ Men were still being withdrawn from farms and elsewhere to form the 16th Reinforcements and ‘the general resistance of farmers was heightened by universal emphasis on food production <sup>1</sup>.’ The campaign in a by-election for the **Hamilton** seat helped to give irritation a political edge, and ‘the announcement on the 24th of May of a ballot calling some 5,000 men for service did not help, even though the announcement stated that in the meantime no one would be called up <sup>2</sup>.’**

**On the eve of the voting in **Hamilton**, a marginal seat which had been won from Labour in 1943, the matter was taken up by Polson, as acting Leader of the Opposition. ‘In the opinion of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to Fraser, 19 Jun 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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**National Party,’ he wrote, ‘the time has come to decide what New Zealand's course of action should be in the future—whether, in view of the food position and the urgent need for more production, we would not be serving the best interests of the Empire and our allies by concentrating on such service.’ In the absence of such a decision the new call-up was bound to cause confusion, and the National Party held ‘the emphatic opinion that unless Great Britain specifically requests the transfer of our troops to the Near East or some other theatre of war, they should come home, but in any event the matter is of such importance that Parliament should make a decision at once <sup>1</sup>.’ John A. Lee, who was a candidate for the **Hamilton** seat, took the same general line. He ‘consistently contended that New Zealand had done too much, should**

not send any more men overseas but should concentrate on food production and the reconstruction of the internal economy <sup>2</sup>.' Nash in reply put strongly the case for continued military participation in the Pacific war. 'If New Zealand deserted her allies now, how could she expect them to help her if she was menaced by an aggressor in 10 years' time, and without that help what hope would a country as small as New Zealand have of defending herself? <sup>3</sup>' The following day-on which the election was held-he referred to the advice given by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and said that 'The indications are that a small land force will be required, but not in any way approximate to the numbers which we have contributed towards the war against Germany <sup>4</sup>.'

At the polls on 26 May the National Party held the seat, the Labour vote dropped by 1900 as against a 1400 drop in the Nationalist vote, and Lee gained 255 more votes than had his candidate in 1943. <sup>5</sup> Nash's conclusion was that 'With so many voices suggesting that there is an honourable way out of the war a fair section of public opinion is ready to believe it. Hamilton, which was one of the most troublesome areas in connection with the furlough problem, was of course relatively fertile ground for this idea, but it seems to be true that the views expressed by the Nationalists and Lee have some fairly general appeal throughout New Zealand and the maintenance of a vigorous war effort by New Zealand may become something of a political liability unless through skilful and effective publicity we can once more build up a public sense of responsibility and duty.' The Government, in fact, was to some extent the victim of its own propaganda: the trouble,

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 25 May 1945

<sup>2</sup> Nash to Fraser, 19 Jun 1945.

<sup>3</sup> *Dominion*, 25 May 1945.

<sup>4</sup> **Auckland Star**, 26 May 1945.

<sup>5</sup> The Nationalist vote was 6777, Labour 5711, and Mr Lee's 1231.- *Round Table*, September 1945, p. 379.

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thought Nash, was 'due in large measure to the emphasis placed in the past on the relatively high casualties sustained by New Zealand and the publicity given to the distinctive part played by the New Zealand Division in operations, which has built up the impression here that New Zealand has done more than its fair share <sup>1</sup>.'

Nash's reports from **Hamilton** raised in Fraser's mind the gravest apprehensions, in which national interests and honour became entangled with the need to command a solid following within the Labour Party. The question arose, he wrote, as to 'whether we can both carry out our duty as we would like to do to fulfil our obligations to **Australia**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** by sending the Division to fight in the **Pacific** war and survive' as a government. To insist on sending a division to the **Pacific** 'would appear to involve a complete defiance of public opinion, clinging only to what we would believe would be the path of duty and honour.' Nor was that all. Fraser himself and Nash might feel clear enough on the issue; but what of their colleagues in cabinet and in the Labour Party generally? Would they think the provision of a force against **Japan** so important as to 'be worth the defeat of the government and its prospects of still further benefiting the people of New Zealand? Would not there be a danger of the party itself revolting even if Cabinet by a majority agreed?' Would objection be silenced, if not converted, he asked his deputy, by a message from Churchill expressly asking for the help of the Division in the **Pacific** war? <sup>2</sup>

Peter Fraser, as party leader, was always extremely sensitive to currents in public opinion and he was probably over-impressed by the difficulties likely to arise if a substantial New Zealand land force were

provided for the last stages of the war against **Japan**. True enough, opinion was sensitively balanced and considerable care would be needed. On the one hand, for example, the announcement that the replacement scheme for long-service men would be continued and speeded up had an appreciable effect on public sentiment. On the other hand, the commander of the South Pacific area, Admiral Calhoun, gravely embarrassed the Government on 4 June by a very well-meaning statement to a press conference 'that the most important thing that New Zealand could do now to help in the **Pacific** was to assist in the feeding of the American troops.' Walter Nash, reporting as acting Prime Minister, judged that the public would be prepared to accept, though reluctantly, the policy of providing a land force for the **Pacific** provided that it was less in size than a full division. 'There is not likely to be any enthusiasm,' he wrote, 'and public opinion would need to be carefully educated'

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to Fraser, 30 May 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser to Nash, 5 Jun 1945.

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and sustained in support of this effort.' The matter was discussed at a conference of newspaper editors in May, when a land force of 15,000 men was suggested and 'in general' accepted. The impression remained that the press and the Opposition would at best acquiesce in the project rather than support it. In Nash's view, a strong message from Churchill might, indeed, silence active criticism from the Opposition, but 'it would not tend to satisfy the Labour Movement after his speech in **Britain** at the opening of the election campaign.... Opinion within the Party has been very critical, in common with the rest of the community.' Nevertheless, he judged 'that with the general slackening of tension we can carry the majority of them with us in a general acceptance of a reduced army commitment <sup>1</sup>.'

Fraser's sensible conclusion was that the whole matter had 'now



become a major political question' so that 'Parliament will, in my opinion, have to be consulted.' It was, therefore, a matter of considerable embarrassment that on the day of his return to New Zealand Churchill should have made a direct appeal for help, with an urgent request that 'a very early reply' should be given as to whether it would be forthcoming. 'With the early capture of **Rangoon** and the prospect of the opening of the Malacca Straits before the end of the year,' said Churchill, it now seemed that a British Commonwealth force might take part in operations against the Japanese main islands. He proposed, therefore, that 'the headquarters and two infantry brigades of the New Zealand Division now in **Italy** should join this force and that the R.N.Z.A.F. should form part of the air component <sup>2</sup>.' In the circumstances, Fraser could only reply that the air and naval units would be available, but that during his three months' absence the future of the land forces had 'become a major political problem.' He told Churchill, accordingly, that 'unless and until the Government and the Opposition are at one on this issue, and unless there is the largest degree of unanimity in Parliament, a firm commitment cannot be entered into <sup>3</sup>.'

Fraser then set about with characteristic diligence to rebuild the conditions of parliamentary unanimity. During the debate in Parliament a few days after the Prime Minister's return, **Holland**, Leader of the Opposition, took much the same line on New Zealand's participation in the **Pacific** war as Polson had done in Hamilton. His view, that is to say, was that New Zealand's manpower was over-committed and that she should concentrate on providing food rather than fighting men. He added, nevertheless, 'I do not enjoy the confidence of the Government and the

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to Fraser, 19 Jun 1945.

<sup>2</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 5 Jul 1945.



Government has not sought my advice; however, if the war strategists and the commanders-in-chief say that a land force is necessary, and they can produce evidence in support of that contention, I think it is the duty of New Zealand to comply with the request of those people <sup>1</sup>.' It was evident how much had been lost since the early days of the war, when Opposition leaders saw the essential cables behind policy decisions. It is true that with the general increase of tension between the parties in the latter stages of the war, the sharp differences of opinion on war policy in the middle of 1945 might have proved unavoidable. All the same, earlier precedent now suggested a course of action. A by-election was about to be held in Dunedin West, and before the party leaders set out for the final campaign, Fraser asked **Holland** to call on him. He showed the Leader of the Opposition the cablegrams relevant to the problem of New Zealand's **Pacific** land forces and promised to give him copies to show to his colleagues. **Holland**, for his part, promised not to raise the matter at the by-election.

The election was held on 21 July, when Labour held the seat with a reduced majority; and thereafter the political negotiations proceeded at reasonable speed. The Labour parliamentary caucus approved the Government's proposals, though with some dissentients. The Opposition proposed at first that the land force sent against **Japan** should be confined to a single brigade. Cabinet and its advisers persuaded it that the disadvantages of this plan were overwhelming. Both political parties, however, seemed to agree that the total manpower in New Zealand's land, air and naval forces should be kept down to 55,000. The Chiefs of Staff, therefore, under some pressure, produced plans for the disposition of this reduced manpower, but still providing a two-brigade division (with an establishment of 16,000) against **Japan**. The plan was finally put to Parliament in the debate on 2 and 3 August and was confirmed with seemingly expressions of unanimous though vaguely expressed enthusiasm. The Government and people, it was resolved, 'are inflexibly resolved to

devote all their energies and all their resources in the prosecution of the war' and to make 'such military contributions as are within the capacity of our remaining sources of manpower, having due regard to our responsibility to produce foodstuffs and other materials for the Allied Forces in the **Pacific**, and for the people of **Britain** and **Europe** <sup>2</sup>.' There was naturally no public reference to the destination of the force approved, but the British Government was told that it should be included in the British

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 268, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 823, 879.

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Force to take part in the invasion of **Japan**. <sup>1</sup> Word came at the same time from **London** that the Potsdam Conference had reached agreement on the way in which this force was to be used, <sup>2</sup> and on 7 August War Cabinet approved the proposals for the New Zealand forces to be provided against **Japan**. By this time, however, an atomic bomb had been dropped on **Hiroshima** and a few days later **Japan** surrendered.

New Zealand could thus scrap, with relief, her painfully constructed plans to take a part in the final invasion of **Japan** appropriate to her newly conceived status as a **Pacific** power.

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of External Affairs to SSSA, 4 Aug 1945.

<sup>2</sup> PM UK to PM NZ, 4 Aug 1945.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

# CHAPTER 22 – FOUNDATIONS OF THE FUTURE

## CHAPTER 22

### *Foundations of the Future*

**FOR New Zealand the waging of war was not, according to the famous phrase, the continuation of policy by other means, but rather a demonstration of the necessity of having a policy at all. She could, in fact, no longer afford the luxury of being unconcerned with external affairs: unconcerned, whether because the course of world events was unimportant to her, or because she was content to follow uncritically the lead of the mother country, or because she was associated with external friends so powerful that she must willy-nilly fall in with their wishes. Wartime events showed only too clearly that overseas politics were of profound importance for New Zealand and that mistakes were dangerous even for her. They proved that her judgment differed in important ways from that of **Britain**, and they catapulted her into a turbulent **Pacific** environment where the old rules did not apply and where, if she did not defend her own viewpoint with competence as well as with courage, neither the British nor the Americans nor even the Australians were likely to do it for her. The evidence was indeed plain. It was underlined by consciousness of national peril and it was presented to a group of political leaders who had long fought against the comfortable colonialism of New Zealand's traditional outlook. The war convinced cabinet, if not the general public, that the Dominion must have an intelligently planned and sustained external policy. The viewpoint, however, remained characteristically practical. For example, while systematic steps were taken to make possible a genuinely independent external policy, the Statute of Westminster was not ratified until 1947 despite solid arguments that such a step was timely. <sup>1</sup>**

**In plain fact neither the administrative nor the political machinery was adequate to framing such a policy, particularly in wartime. In one small but significant matter, for instance, New Zealand alone among the Dominions in 1939 still kept to the old practice by which messages between her Government and that of **Britain** passed through the Governor-General. It was no great matter in peacetime, though**

sometimes awkward when the Governor-General was out of **Wellington**, and, as was pointed out at the Imperial Conference of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. ed. Beaglehole, *Statute of Westminster*. In similar vein New Zealand showed little interest in wartime suggestions for mechanical improvements in Commonwealth consultation, finding in them little prospect of practical advantage over existing conventions.— Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931–1952* Vol. I, p.593.

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1937, the ‘system is an anachronism unless New Zealand still desires to retain some of the machinery which was appropriate only when New Zealand was a colony under the control of Great Britain.’ Change was deferred, however, until the practical disadvantages had become quite plain. With the outbreak of war the main weakness of the old method was quietly removed, for the cipher staff which handled the confidential cables left its lodging in **Government House** and was established in the Prime Minister's Department. Then, when Lord Galway's term as Governor-General was about to expire, the Government took the commonsense step of suggesting that with the arrival of his successor New Zealand should adopt the same practice as other dominions. It was arranged, accordingly, that from 1 February 1941 communications should be exchanged directly between the Prime Minister of New Zealand and the British Government; a development which speeded up and facilitated the intimate personal contacts essential to the smooth working of the British Commonwealth at war.

Further steps followed which were of first-class, long-term importance. In the first place, diplomatic posts were established in four countries bordering on the **Pacific**: in the **United States** at the end of 1941 and **Canada** in April 1942; in **Australia** in February 1943 and in **Russia** a year later. <sup>1</sup> This last step, incidentally, represented New Zealand's widest divergence from her customary caution in diplomatic matters, but it was taken with a surprisingly wide degree of public support. These new posts were solidly manned. They were established

with some publicity, and helped to demonstrate both to New Zealanders and to their allies that the Dominion had some stature and independence. They also served not only as mouthpieces overseas but as sources of information by which independent policy-making could be influenced. The New Zealand Government was from the first well served, for it received British diplomatic information and voluminous material through the High Commissioner's Office in **London** and the British High Commissioner in **Wellington**. From the end of 1939 onwards, **General Freyberg's** reports were an able and valued supplement. Nevertheless, the development of a rudimentary set of diplomatic posts in overseas capitals did something, from New Zealand's point of view, to improve the balance, as well as to increase the volume, of information on world affairs.

The establishment of independent diplomatic posts was plainly significant, but there was probably greater fundamental importance in the decision of March 1943 that the intelligent interest of politicians and the devoted labours of a few individuals should at last

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<sup>1</sup> Formal documents making the appointments were dated 23 April 1942 ( **USA**); 14 May 1942 ( **Canada**); 27 Feb 1943 ( **Australia**); 15 Mar 1944 ( **Russia**). But action in several cases had already been taken.

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be given adequate machinery for the framing of New Zealand's foreign policy.

Up to this time external relations were administered by a handful of men in the Prime Minister's Department, while the so-called **Department of External Affairs** was concerned only with island territories. The decision was now made that these last should be administered by a new department, now to be correctly titled, and that relations with other members of the Commonwealth and with foreign countries should be handled by a new, properly organised **Department of External Affairs**. The old rather casual and personal arrangement could no longer deal

with the sheer volume of material flowing in, nor with the continual necessity to make quick decisions on complex issues which were matters of life and death. Information, it was plain, must be properly digested for the guidance of those making policy decisions, and this could only be done by a team of experts making a continuous survey of problems likely to arise, as well as those already pressing for attention.

Such considerations underlay the External Affairs Act of June 1943. In the first instance the new department remained virtually indistinguishable in personnel from the Prime Minister's Department from which it had sprung. The change, however, was made the occasion for steady recruitment of men taken directly into the department because of individual competence and not recruited in the usual way by graduation from the Public Service in general. Furthermore, it made possible an extensive differentiation in function. Accordingly, New Zealand in 1943 set about the building up, on lines that had been successfully followed in sister countries, of a **Department of External Affairs** equipped in personnel and knowledge and status to support the new active and independent role that New Zealand was coming to take in international affairs.

The creation of a systematically organised **Department of External Affairs** left intact a salient feature of the New Zealand political pattern: the concentration of policy decisions in the hands of a few key men and their presumed omnicompetence in the face of problems ranging from the intricacies of East European politics and the principles of the **United Nations Organisation**, to the tactics of domestic politics and the administration of legislation in individual cases. In particular, all depended on the Prime Minister, his deputy, and two or three trusted official advisers. Time and again, New Zealand's policies depended on the personal decisions of Savage, Fraser, and Nash. The course of things was necessarily influenced by the temporary absence overseas of Fraser or Nash or, on occasion, of both of them and, especially towards the end of the war, by the illnesses which from time to time smote them both.

It was in line with New Zealand tradition that a Prime Minister and



one or two others should run a cabinet and be called upon to decide all policy matters, great and small. The tendency was necessarily accentuated by wartime conditions, and it had much to commend it. On most issues the views of Fraser and Nash, who were in any case the most effective members of the team, tended to coincide. Moreover, they tended genuinely to represent a broad consensus of unformulated opinion in the Labour Party and indeed in the community in general. Again, Fraser in particular showed in wartime a notable capacity to disentangle the essentials in a complex situation and to carve out quickly a line of policy related to solid principles. In committee work in **London**, **Washington** and **San Francisco**, as well as in **Wellington**, he handsomely held his own in distinguished company. At his best, he both saw clearly and spoke firmly. Certain of his diplomatic communications have a quite unwonted sting and candour. 'All I have to add,' he said at the conclusion of discussion on a British policy decision which he feared might weaken the morale of wage-earners, 'is that I have never known of the use of weaker arguments to bolster up a foolish action'. On occasion—the Polish problem at the end of the war was a case in point—his personal understanding proved remarkable; and he was capable at times both of reaching a quick decision and fighting for it with dexterous pertinacity against heavy odds. This happened, for example, in the critical manpower discussions of May 1943.

This instance, however, illustrates also an aspect of the problem which became increasingly serious. In May 1943 Fraser did not finally make up his mind on the right principle of action until the very last possible moment. As the war went on, problems at times took on an appearance of insolubility, while daily business, including the necessity to manage domestic policies, clamoured for attention. Indecision and the postponement of consideration of some awkward matters were a natural defence for men who were growing tired and ill and whose training and attitude inclined them towards personal, unbusinesslike methods of administration. According to report the files bearing on unresolved problems sometimes rose like protective bulwarks round a Minister or were thickly dispersed over desk and floor like a generous

snowfall. Harassed officials sometimes had to fight hard to extract their instructions. Yet the point should not be exaggerated. The machine worked, and when crises arose they were ultimately resolved in ways not discreditable to New Zealand's political judgment and her loyalty to the common cause. Moreover, if Fraser was at times tired, evasive, tortuous, worried about detail and generally resistant to those who pressed him to make up his mind, he showed again and again that when he was finally cornered a courageous decision would be made (and its consequences fought through to a conclusion) on principles which were broadly consistent with New Zealand's basic attitudes. The strength of the position after 1943 was that the machinery of a professional **Department of External Affairs** was available to inform the minds and sustain the judgments of politicians when at last a matter was taken in hand.

New Zealand, it is manifest, learned the necessity for a well organised **Department of External Affairs** the hard way, by being confronted with problems which even wise men could handle only when well informed and when supported by specialists. These problems arose even in the relatively familiar fields of **Europe** and **Africa** and the **Middle East**, so soon as it was established that the use of New Zealand forces, and even her economic war effort, was a matter for responsible and independent judgment, not merely for the discovering of British wishes and then carrying them out. The problem of intervention in **Greece**, the attitude of **Turkey** and **Persia**, the probable reactions of Frenchmen to Allied landings in **Africa**, the strength of Italian morale and of Russian military forces; these matters necessarily entered into calculations where New Zealand had repeatedly claimed the right to be heard. Far more complex from her point of view were problems arising in the **Pacific**. In Europe decisions turned on relationships between New Zealand and a single mighty friend, whose policy was dominated by the congenial and persuasive personality of Churchill. In the **Pacific**, the balance, in some sense, had to be held between **Britain** and the **United States**; and the American attitude towards small allies, though eminently friendly, was brusque and mindful of their relative unimportance. Moreover, in **Pacific** affairs, New Zealand was, and felt

herself to be, a principal; a small power, no doubt, but one with direct and urgent interests, and charged, together with **Australia**, to represent the British Commonwealth in troubled waters. The field was new, and in this kind of work New Zealand was inexperienced, apart from the long-sustained personal interest of some individuals. To be active here, however, was the logical working out of attitudes long since adopted, attitudes given vigorous expression in the far-off days of Coates's premiership in 1925–28 and nurtured by the leaders of the Labour Party both in opposition and in power. Community feeling naturally lagged behind the action of far-sighted men, but during the Second World War the basic principle which meant, in essence, that New Zealand must act as a nation and not as a colony, had become virtually an agreed policy among public men. In a vigorous parliamentary debate in March 1943 about New Zealand's participation in the **Pacific** war, it was forcefully said by a leading minister that 'the facts as presented to us were so compelling that I do not think any group of four or five men in the house would have arrived at any decisions other than those that have been made <sup>1</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> D. G. Sullivan on 17 Mar 1943, *NZPD*, Vol. 262, p. 440.

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New Zealand was, then, pitchforked into diplomatic activity, particularly in respect of the **Pacific** area; an activity in which strategic and political matters were inextricably intertwined. <sup>1</sup> Moreover, political considerations were by no means confined to current problems. As the struggle ceased, for the Commonwealth, to be one of mere survival, hopes and fears for the post-war world increasingly influenced the current policies of all the partners. In the **Pacific** area in particular, this meant for New Zealand breaking new ground and getting along with her American friends in a way which would make the best of wartime co-operation, and at the same time would tend to build up the kind of world favoured in New Zealand's long-term thinking.

After the catastrophes of mid-1940, the idealistic note in New

**Zealand's foreign policy—the aspiration toward a better world where wars would not occur—was necessarily submerged by the extreme harshness of contemporary reality. With attention focused on ways of avoiding defeat, there was little encouragement to speculate on what to do with an obviously distant victory. When the tide turned, towards the end of 1942, the passions aroused in a bitter struggle had produced their result, even in New Zealand. After the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 Churchill endorsed Roosevelt's statement that the Allies would require unconditional surrender from **Germany** and **Japan**, and there was no protest, public or diplomatic, from New Zealand. Yet there could have been no clearer repudiation of the proposition formulated by her cabinet three years earlier: 'Experience has abundantly shown that good does not come out of a peace imposed by a victor on the vanquished. We should therefore not wait until the exhaustion and bitterness of war has rendered impossible a peace on equal and rational terms <sup>2</sup>.' She could, of course, have had little hope in January 1943 of persuading Roosevelt and Churchill to alter their momentous, if somewhat casual, decision. Yet she never hesitated to set down her views, if only for the sake of the record, on those occasions when she seriously disagreed with British policy. A peace 'on equal and rational terms' had manifestly not been attainable even in 1939. By 1943 even New Zealand, tacitly though probably unconsciously, recognised that 'the exhaustion and bitterness of war' had rendered such a peace impossible for an indefinite number of years ahead.**

**It is true that New Zealand still clung to an article of faith which in her foreign policy was second only to loyalty to the British Commonwealth, namely, the faith that peace could be most effectively preserved by all nations combining against an aggressor, as**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. McNeill, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Savage to Fraser, 5 Nov 1939.

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provided under the Covenant of the **League of Nations** or some very similar international organisation. As hopes for victory in the foreseeable future grew more rational and planning for peace more urgent, this faith once more acquired practical importance; for it increasingly influenced the views she expressed in the councils of the **United Nations** and helped to emphasise her community of interest with certain of her close associates. Nevertheless, New Zealand's first publicised views on the post-war settlement emerged less from her own Government's resurgent faith in international institutions than from the more concrete aspirations of the Australian Government in the **Pacific** area, or more exactly, from Australian reactions to American policy as it concerned the two **Pacific** dominions.

By 1943 it began to appear from two sharply contrasting lines of thought in the **United States**, that American policy might call for quite considerable changes in the **Pacific** area after the war. The first of these lines of thought was idealistic. American liberals had long wished to induce the so-called colonial powers to grant independence as soon as possible to their colonies. This feeling, of course, affected territories much more important than the **Pacific** islands that were the immediate concern of **Australia** and New Zealand, and was very strong in the American Government, from the President and his Secretary of State, **Cordell Hull**, downwards. Unlike Churchill, Roosevelt took the view that the sentence inserted at his own request in the Atlantic Charter—‘they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them’—referred not only to the occupied countries of **Europe** but to colonial peoples everywhere. <sup>1</sup> American ideas seem first to have been put into relatively definite form in a draft written by State Department officials in March 1943 under the guidance of **Cordell Hull**. This proposed ultimate independence as the goal for all colonial areas, and the establishment of an international trusteeship administration to assume responsibility for peoples unprepared for full independence who ‘as a result of the war ... would be released from political ties with nations formerly responsible for them <sup>2</sup>.’ This statement contrasted with a much more conservative draft prepared in

the previous month by the British Government. The British draft drew no substantial comment from New Zealand. The Australians, however, urged with some success that the principle of trusteeship should be written into it. They also remarked significantly that the British draft might be held to 'amount to requiring an absolute return to the status quo as regards sovereignty and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilmot, pp. 633–6; see also draft reproduced by Churchill, Vol. III, p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, Vol. II, p. 1235, quotation from Hull's summary of the document.

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administrative control.' It might well, therefore, be regarded by other colonial powers as denying any change whatsoever. Clearly, added the Australians, substantial changes might be found desirable in South-east Asia.

American idealism, then, opened up a wide field. It challenged Churchill's principle that the British Empire should be kept intact and it drew some sympathy from Australia, if not from New Zealand. At the same time, American realism raised issues which were more material and which bore more closely on the Pacific area. Many Americans, it became clear, had no intention of lessening the grip over the Pacific area which had been acquired with such effort and cost. Certain congressmen, with some encouragement from Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, argued that the United States, having lost the lives of its servicemen in fighting for the islands in the Pacific, and having spent its money in building bases on them, should continue to hold those bases after the end of the war. Secretary Hull at one time suggested that Allied countries who benefited from lend-lease should grant bases to the Americans. On another occasion the Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee said that the United States would 'just take' Japanese mandated and other islands. <sup>1</sup> Such remarks inevitably roused fears in

the southern Dominions that in respect of the **Pacific** islands **Britain** might have to yield to American pressure, whether exercised in the name of strategy or of idealistic trusteeship. The contradiction between these two principles did not make their combination under American auspices any less awkward to the British Commonwealth.

New Zealand had long been uneasy about American claims among the **Pacific** islands. After the Japanese attack she had striven to establish her claim to a share in planning a peace settlement in the **Pacific** area, and it was much in the mind of key men that that area was a proper field for the operation of those ideals of international action and trusteeship which, for New Zealand, had been expressed in the **League of Nations**.<sup>2</sup> When, therefore, the Australian Government pressed for a definition of policy in the **Pacific**, New Zealand was a willing associate.

From the earliest days of the war, collaboration between **Australia** and New Zealand had been close alike in the spheres of politics, of strategy and of supply. On matters of common interest such as the closing of the **Burma Road**, the defence conferences at **Singapore**, the organisation of strategic commands in the **Pacific**, the two governments consulted each other before communicating their views elsewhere, and in some cases formulated a joint policy to submit

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<sup>1</sup> C. F. E. Seibert, *ANZAC Pact*, unpublished thesis, Victoria University library, p. 48, quoting Stone, *Colonial Trusteeship*, p. 21, and Price, *Australia Comes of Age*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Nash, *New Zealand*, *passim*.

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for the approval of **Britain** or of the **United States**. Even where the ultimate decisions were different, as on the issue of the return of dominion troops from the **Middle East**, intimate and at times very lively discussions had preceded the final action. The accession to power of the Australian Labour Party in October 1941 gave them like-minded



governments, and with the outbreak of the **Pacific** war they had in common a dangerous enemy whose threat was far more immediate to them than to any other country of the Commonwealth, or indeed, to the **United States** itself. There was, admittedly, a significant difference between their responses to this danger. For Australia more than for New Zealand the actual physical threat of Japanese invasion was a menace which had been long foreseen and which had entered deeply into national thinking. The sharpness of Australian response thus had an historical explanation and, for the time being at least, made her vehemently **Pacific**-minded. Her keen resentment when New Zealand decided not to demand the return of all her forces from the **Mediterranean** area was, however, a matter of detail compared with the strength of the forces giving the two dominions a community of interest. They were physically located in the **Pacific**, and vitally concerned, therefore, in the postwar settlement of that whole area. They were, moreover, small powers conscious that crucial decisions were being made by Churchill and Roosevelt, and conscious, too, that their diplomatic strength would be increased if they could learn to speak in unison.

The natural spearhead of the new diplomatic drive from the southern **Pacific** was Herbert Evatt, the forceful Australian Minister of External Affairs. His attitude drew together threads of Australian feeling about foreign policy. In the background lay that complex of economic, political and racialist arguments underlying a rather flamboyantly proclaimed White Australia policy. Close to hand was the Australian Labour Party's period of isolationism, when the argument ran that the country's defence effort, if it were necessary at all, should be specifically directed to the local defence of the South Pacific area. Added to this was a sense of mission which Evatt expressed in April 1943 in the most general of terms: 'The two British democracies in the **Pacific, Australia** and New Zealand,' he told the Americans, 'are the trustees of democratic civilisation in the South Pacific <sup>1</sup>.' **Australia's** mission, however, reflected an imperial exuberance which has at times been shared by statesmen in both of the southern dominions. 'Vogel and Seddon



howling Empire from an empty coast, <sup>2</sup> like Evatt, were in their day spokesmen of a vigorous attitude wherein were combined in nice propor-

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<sup>1</sup> Seibert, p. 50, quoting *Current Notes*, 15 Jun 1943; Evatt, *Foreign Policy of Australia* p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> In the phrase of the New Zealand poet Allen Curnow.

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expansionist ambitions and benevolent hopes for the territories about to pass under British domination. Moreover, in 1943, the fulfilment of the 'mission' clearly demanded independent political action. When Evatt launched a series of talks between the two governments in October 1943, he told the New Zealand High Commissioner that ' **Australia** and New Zealand in co-operation should be the foundation of the British sphere of influence in the South West and South Pacific. The future safety and prosperity of these two Dominions depended on their having a decisive voice in these areas.' He was also 'inclined to suggest that it would be wise for Great Britain to transfer all British colonies in these areas to **Australia** and New Zealand, **Australia** gradually to take the **Solomons** area and New Zealand to take **Fiji** etc.' At the same time he frankly expressed 'some uneasiness as to the future possibilities of the American policy in the **Pacific**.'

A further stimulus to Australian initiative in this field was the manner in which the leaders of the **United Nations** framed Allied policy, whether for the conduct of the war or for the peace that was to follow. In particular, **Australia** resented the virtual exclusion of small powers from critical discussions where their interests were intimately involved. In October 1943, for example, complex negotiations culminated in the so-called Moscow Declaration <sup>1</sup> by which the **United States**, the **United Kingdom**, **Russia** and **China** pledged themselves among other things to continue their collaboration after the war, and recognised 'the necessity

of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organisation, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace-loving states and open to membership by all such states, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security'. The upshot involved the overriding of Australian views, especially on the much-debated problem of **China's** status.

New Zealand and **Australia** had been consulted during September on the draft of the declaration, when the Australians said that it was unreal to include **China** with the Big Three in the proposed declaration, and that one of the Three should be, not the **United Kingdom**, but the British Commonwealth of Nations. If they were to agree to the clause foreshadowing joint action to maintain security, argued the Australian Government, **Australia** should be included as one of the parties to act on behalf of the community of nations, either separately or as part of the British Commonwealth. Nor would they rest content were this merely achieved in practice; they asked that it be formally recognised as well. <sup>2</sup> New Zealand,

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<sup>1</sup> McNeill, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> Aust. Minister of External Affairs to NZ Minister of External Affairs, 18 Sep 1943.

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being consulted by the Australians, was not unsympathetic to the Australian viewpoint, yet hoped to avoid delay and did not 'wish to make an issue of the inclusion by name of the individual members of the British Commonwealth <sup>1</sup>.' However, after the declaration had been issued, a joint telegram was sent to the **United Kingdom** by the two dominions. 'Subject always to consultation and agreement with the other governments concerned', they wished that, in the arrangements that should immediately follow the ejection of the Japanese, **Australia** should have full responsibility for policing Portuguese Timor and the **Solomons** and a share in the policing of the Dutch East Indies and the

**New Hebrides.** ‘As regards **Pacific Islands** in general south of the equator we believe that responsibility for policing should primarily be with the **United Kingdom, Australia** and **New Zealand**, though it is realised that regard must be paid to the position of the **United States** which already has a Naval Base in Tutuila <sup>2</sup>.’

Neither Dominion was consulted on the terms of the **Cairo Declaration** of 1 December, in which the **United States, Britain** and **China** declared their intention of taking from **Japan** all territories seized by her since 1895. Evatt wrote after the war that both dominions were most concerned at the mode of making this decision. ‘Much the same conclusion might very well have been reached by a general assembly of the nations participating in the war against **Japan**,’ he declared, ‘but the fact remained that it was a pronouncement by a self-selected few and not the result of reasoned deliberation of all concerned <sup>3</sup>.’ **New Zealand** did not formally protest at the time on this issue. The Prime Minister, like Curtin and Evatt, objected to what had been done, but reserved action till after the impending talks between the two dominion governments.

In general, **Australia** and **New Zealand** during 1943 found themselves substantially in agreement in their thinking about the postwar world, and increasingly anxious that their views should receive more attention, at least when the **Pacific** was in question, than the Big Three seemed disposed to give them. In mid-January 1944 a **New Zealand** delegation headed by Fraser visited **Australia** for discussions on the whole matter, and found with some surprise that the **Australians** had in mind the signing of a solemn treaty or pact between the two dominions. The **New Zealand** delegates doubted the wisdom and the constitutional propriety of negotiating a formal treaty in the circumstances. Their idea had been essentially an exchange of opinions, the natural culmination of which would have

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<sup>1</sup> NZ Minister of External Affairs to Aust. Minister of External Affairs, 21 Sep 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Set out in Aust. Minister of External Affairs to NZ Minister of External Affairs, 25 Jan 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Evatt, *Australia in World Affairs*, p. 99.

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been an agreed record of the proceedings. In the end, however, Fraser agreed to sign an agreement showing the objectives of the Dominions 'on questions on which we had a single mind and recording the means we proposed to adopt for future collaboration and cooperation.'

As it turned out, the area of agreement was wide and was quickly defined. When the New Zealand delegation reached **Canberra** on 15 January it was presented with the papers setting out the Australian Government's views. After two days of careful work, Fraser could tell the opening session of the conference that New Zealand agreed with the Australian attitude on 75 per cent of the matters set down. On the remaining 25 per cent discussions were 'conducted in a most friendly but nevertheless candid manner' to such good effect that a formal agreement was prepared and duly signed within six days of the New Zealanders' arrival in **Canberra**. This quickly achieved and comprehensive document was an indication alike of the basic community of viewpoint between the two governments, of the thoroughness of preliminary discussion and of an unusual determination to waste no time in talking about matters on which the negotiators were already agreed.

The whole document was forward-looking and concerned primarily with the post-war world and the policy decisions that must precede the peacemaking. In Dr Evatt's phrase, **Australia** and New Zealand were countries 'whose peoples are vitally concerned in the peace, welfare and good government in the **Pacific** and both of whom have by their resolute and long sustained war effort earned the right to play a leading role in the future of this part of the world.' His view, also, was that these two

countries were particularly well qualified by special knowledge and experience for leadership in the **Pacific**, and that a joint Australian and New Zealand policy might well be expected to prevail in the Allied councils. The agreement accordingly provided that the two countries would consult together as far as possible before expressing elsewhere their views on matters of common concern. To make consultation effective and continuous an Australian-New Zealand secretariat was to be set up to organise general collaboration and, where necessary, further conferences. Both governments declared that they should be represented at the highest level in armistice planning and that they should be 'associated, not only in the membership, but also in the planning and establishment' of the international body envisaged in the Moscow Declaration. As an interim measure, of the kind envisaged in Article 5 of the Moscow Declaration, they declared that 'it would be proper for **Australia** and New Zealand to assume full responsibility for policing or sharing in policing such areas in the Southwest or South Pacific as may from time to time be agreed upon.' With an obvious glance at the **United States**, they added that they accepted 'as a recognised principle of international practice that the construction and use in time of war by any power of naval, military or air installations, in any territory under the sovereignty or control of another power does not, in itself, afford any basis for territorial claims or rights of sovereignty or control after the conclusion of hostilities.' No changes in the control of any **Pacific** islands, it was claimed, should be made except with their agreement. The doctrine of trusteeship was declared to be 'applicable in broad principle to all colonial territories in the **Pacific** and elsewhere.'

On the principle of trusteeship, moreover, the two governments based constructive proposals which were to have concrete results. They agreed 'to promote the establishment at the earliest possible date of a regional organisation with advisory powers which could be called the South Seas Regional Commission.' Its functions would be to promote the advancement and well-being of native peoples through 'a common policy on social, economic and political development' to be established by the powers with responsibilities in this area. Detailed suggestions followed.

In more general terms the two governments agreed that there should be as soon as possible a conference among governments with **Pacific** interests to discuss 'the problems of security, post-war development and native welfare', arising in the South Pacific or the South-west **Pacific** areas.

The two governments' policies on certain other long-standing problems were then made plain. They expressed their preference for an International Air Transport Authority, with a system of air routes owned by British Commonwealth governments as second choice. They also undertook to support each other in maintaining the principle that every government had the right to control migration into and out of its territories. A significant new principle was registered in the agreement that 'there should be cooperation in achieving full employment in **Australia** and New Zealand and the highest standards of social security both within their borders and throughout the islands of the **Pacific** and other territories for which they may be responsible <sup>1</sup>.' It may be noted that the provisions in the agreement on international aviation and on native welfare seem to have been desired mainly by the **New Zealand Government**. The rest would seem, on the whole, to be the result of the enthusiasm of the Australians.

When the text was cabled to **Wellington**, Cabinet evidently felt some uneasiness and thought that care must be taken in the manner of publication. Such a bilateral pact, it was felt, might strengthen the trends weakening the spirit of unity among the **United Nations**

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<sup>1</sup> *Current Notes*, January 1944, contains text of agreement together with statements by Curtin, Fraser and Evatt.

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and, in particular, might provide ammunition for hostile critics in the **United States**. <sup>1</sup> The documents as finally adopted, however, were much less open to such criticisms than at one time seemed likely. Some of the suggestions which would have been most likely to cause offence were dropped from the agreement on New Zealand's insistence, and some

plain speech was deliberately cut out from the report of the proceedings which was sent to the Government of the **United Kingdom**. For example, New Zealand refused to support a suggestion from **Australia** that the administration of the Solomon Islands should be transferred to her, together with the British share, or possibly the whole, of the Franco-British condominium of the **New Hebrides**. In the report to **Britain** the two dominions decided in the end not to say in so many words that they objected to the **United States** being given the duty of policing the **Pacific** south of the Equator, or that they would 'under no circumstances agree to the establishment of a condominium with the **United States** as a party' in **New Ireland**, **New Britain**, the **Solomons**, **New Caledonia**, **New Hebrides**, the **Cook Islands** or **Western Samoa**. Further, the reference to the decisions at the **Cairo** Conference, which had done a good deal towards stinging the two dominions into action, was considerably toned down. Those decisions, the delegates had felt, vitally affected the distribution of power in the **Pacific** and positions of great importance were given away, no consideration being obtained in return, while 'no special regard was given to the interests of unrepresented countries like **Australia** and New Zealand.' In the end the Australian and New Zealand report to the British Government gave a broad hint of discontent on this matter, not as originally proposed a blunt, if not violent, protest. Both the text, then, and the confidential documents explaining it were carefully drafted, and Fraser in particular emphasised 'that neither the holding of this Conference, nor the agreement resulting from it is, in any sense, a departure from the principles of the British Commonwealth of Nations, membership of which is the very forefront of the policy of both **Australia** and New Zealand.'

In this spirit the agreement was generally accepted in New Zealand. In particular, the Opposition accepted the substance of the agreement and agreed that there was nothing in it to disturb New Zealand's relations with the **United States**, and that there was no good reason why, in taking care of her own interests, New Zealand should not maintain a good-neighbour policy with **America**. Holland's criticism was of a machinery character. He thought that Parliament should have been



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<sup>1</sup> NZ Minister of External Affairs to HCNZ, **Canberra**, 21 Jan 1944.

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sition

should have been represented in discussions which would be apt to bind future governments as well as that now holding office. <sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, all the tact of which Evatt was capable could not disguise the fundamental character of the agreement. Two small powers had reacted against the secrecy with which Roosevelt and Churchill had proceeded at **Moscow** and **Cairo** and **Teheran** and, without consulting their great allies, had firmly asserted their right to be considered as full and equal partners in all policy-making relating to their own part of the world. They had, moreover, and again without obtaining a clearance from **London** and **Washington**, announced in quite concrete terms policies which they proposed to advocate. In Australia this aspect of the agreement was strongly criticised by a chain of newspapers under the control of Sir Keith Murdoch and by the parliamentary opposition led by R. G. Menzies. The main ground of objection was the assertion in the agreement of rights over the South Pacific area, a claim which was felt likely to offend **Australia's** friends in the **United States** and in **Britain**. In addition, Menzies strongly criticised one aspect of the agreement which, on the face of it, represented a distinct departure from the main trend of New Zealand's own foreign policy. 'By its crude insistence on the regional idea regardless of what the rest of the world may be thinking,' said Menzies, 'the agreement ignored the vital truth that peace was indivisible. By some queer atavism it reverted to what was only isolationism with a slight territorial extension <sup>2</sup>.'

The pact was, however, welcomed in Great Britain. The newspapers praised it. The British Government, too, expressed itself as favourably disposed. It welcomed 'any steps that may lead to a strengthening of the



ties between members of the British Commonwealth', and cautiously hoped that 'arrangements now made between **Australia** and New Zealand will assist to this result <sup>3</sup>.'

American reaction, as was to be expected, was altogether another matter. The pact was professedly a claim for a share in basic planning for the **Pacific** and a protest against the way the planning had been managed in the past. This was necessarily a challenge to the Americans, whose Chiefs of Staff controlled the strategy of the **Pacific** war with all its political implications, and whose navy seemed to regard the fight against **Japan** as its own private affair, <sup>4</sup> and to resent

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<sup>1</sup> *Truth*, 26 Jan 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Murdoch in *Melbourne Age*, 18 Feb 1944; Menzies in *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 1 Apr 1944.

<sup>3</sup> SSSA to NZ Minister of External Affairs, 12 Feb 1944.

<sup>4</sup> McNeill, pp. 161 and 192. In May 1944 Admiral King proposed to forestall any possible claim by **Australia** and New Zealand to a share in deciding the disposal of the Marshall and Caroline islands by declining to use their forces in the operations for the capture of these islands. It appears that King and other senior officers in **Washington** reacted sharply against the Australian—New Zealand Pact, which they regarded as an attempt to exclude **America** from the South Pacific. There was no failure in co-operation, however, with Nimitz and the commanders in the field.

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the intrusion of other American agencies—let alone the representatives of minor foreign powers. Moreover, American habits in conducting their politics gave publicity to much plainness of speech. The pact, accordingly, was followed by an increased unwillingness on the part of the American Navy to use New Zealand forces in active operations against the Japanese. In the American press there was the

expected outburst among papers known to be virulently anti-British, but echoed in this case by papers under the personal influence of **Frank Knox**, Secretary to the Navy. In Congress there were some picturesque, if perhaps not ultimately important, expressions of opinion. What are we fighting for, asked Senator Shipstead: 'is it really for the socialisation of much of **Europe**, or for the creation of some hybrid Australian-European sovereignty over the entire Western and Southern Pacific Oceans? <sup>1</sup>' The two dominions, said Representative Richards, had been saved from destruction by American arms. This sturdy race who would die rather than lose their liberties and who knew that their defence depended on the **United States**, which must therefore have bases, nevertheless laid claim to a predominant share in disposing of the **Pacific** islands when American boys were dying by thousands in the defence of the South Pacific area. <sup>2</sup>

The comment of the American Government when it at last arrived was both cautious and sensible. **Cordell Hull** remarked that anything in the agreement referring to territories other than those possessed by the two dominions was, of course, entirely without prejudice to the rights of other countries. He suggested that undue haste should not be shown in launching a general conference dealing with **Pacific** problems, since premature discussion might very well weaken rather than promote unity of attitude among the **United Nations**. He said, further, that it was desirable 'to agree upon arrangements for a general international security system before attempting to deal with problems of regional security.' If a premature attempt were made to deal with the **Pacific** as a special problem, this example might be followed and development of a general system of security prejudiced. On the whole, however, the State Department's view seemed to be that the pact was an advance statement of the attitude **Australia** and New Zealand were likely to take in negotiations on the issues involved. There was therefore no reason to take up, at that stage, the points on which the **United States** might not agree with the objectives of the pact.

**Australia** and New Zealand had agreed 'that within the framework of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Melbourne Age*, 17 Feb 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Melbourne Argus*, 20 Apr 1944.

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comprising the South West and South Pacific areas shall be established and that this zone should be based on **Australia** and New Zealand stretching through the arc of islands north and north-east of **Australia** to **Western Samoa** and the **Cook Islands**.' Neither dominion, however, seems to have considered that the **Canberra** system might be taken as a precedent for regional security systems. In his reply to the Secretary of State, Fraser wrote that 'In the view of the **New Zealand Government**, which is shared by the Commonwealth, the preservation of peace can only be maintained effectively under a world system of security and not under a number of systems of regional security.' At the same time New Zealand recognised 'the practical worth of a zone of regional—in the sense of local—defence as distinct from a zone of regional security for the preservation of peace <sup>1</sup>.' The distinction is perhaps rather fine. However, the desire to avoid regional pacts, if possible, had been expressed in the Government's memorandum of 1936 on the reform of the Covenant. This memorandum remained the basis of New Zealand's views on the new international organisation, <sup>2</sup> and the opposition to regionalism was repeatedly emphasised during 1944. Indeed, it was Fraser's main point in May 1944 when a conference of Commonwealth premiers discussed the views on the new security organisation which the **United Kingdom** proposed to place before the Russian and American governments.

The point gained some prominence because of a paper which Churchill laid before that conference, proposing a series of 'Regional Councils', whose representatives together with those of the four powers were to compose the 'World Peace Council'. Churchill seems to have felt that this scheme might help in the building of a **United States** of

**Europe.** Fraser had very strong objections to it. He felt that it might lead to powers being reluctant to co-operate against aggressors outside their own area, and might also be a source of discord between Commonwealth countries in different areas. New Zealand as a small power would wish to make its own voice heard, and not lose identity in a regional organisation. In particular, 'New Zealand feels that a **Pacific** or Asiatic Region, regarded as a permanent unit, is an unreal conception.' There was surely in Fraser's mind the fear that New Zealand and **Australia** might be swamped in a Regional Council predominantly Asiatic. New Zealand, accordingly, together with **Canada** put up a stubborn resistance to Churchill's 'regionalist offensive'. Nevertheless, the regional proposals were incorporated in the Foreign Office paper which was prepared for the guidance of the British delegation at

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<sup>1</sup> PM to US Chargé d'Affaires, **Wellington**, 25 Feb 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser to Berendsen, 8 Aug 1944.

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the coming three-power talks. The argument, accordingly, continued; but when the talks actually took place at **Dumbarton Oaks** in September 1944, the **United Kingdom** delegation did not press for regional arrangements.

On the issue of regionalism, then, New Zealand differed substantially from the British viewpoint in 1944, or at least from the viewpoint of Churchill, and defended her attitude with some vigour. On another current problem, that of trusteeship, New Zealand found herself at variance with **Britain** and more in line with the **United States**. Here she could take a common stand with **Australia**. It was an odd circumstance that after both world wars the Prime Ministers of **Australia** and New Zealand distinguished themselves by their strong views on the colonial question, but in 1945 they took a line precisely opposite to that of their 1919 predecessors. Hughes and Massey were opposed to any international supervision even in the administration of territories taken

from the Germans; Evatt and Fraser wished to see such supervision extended to all colonial territories irrespective of the mode by which they had been acquired. The trusteeship issue as it appeared to them in 1944 was in the broadest terms defined in a paper prepared by the New Zealand delegation for the **Australia**-New Zealand conference of November of that year. The trusteeship principle, wrote the New Zealanders, 'asserts that colonies are not to be used as pawns in the game of international politics, that the wellbeing and development of native peoples is the first consideration and forms a sacred trust of civilisation. The principle has been so long and so well argued as to be no longer questioned. But the *application* of the principle is contested, the crucial point being supervision.'

As an aspect of the problem of international security, trusteeship may appear somewhat of a side issue. Nevertheless, it bulked largely in New Zealand's thinking about the post-war settlement. The welfare of colonial peoples offered a field in which the Government could push those benevolent ideals which on the whole had been sadly baulked by the general trend of international politics. There were also practical considerations involved. Despite a certain uneasiness about the **Cook Islands**, New Zealand spokesmen felt that the members of the British Commonwealth had nothing to fear from an international investigation of their record as colonial powers, but that a reform of the administration of certain other **Pacific** territories was necessary, if only for the security of other countries in the **Pacific** area. It was felt at the time that such reasoning applied particularly to **Tahiti** and to **New Caledonia**, but there were other territories in the **Pacific** which were thought to be badly administered and where 'social services were neglected and the native populations exploited.' The New Zealand view was that, in principle, members of the **United Nations** must be restored to the status and the territories which they had enjoyed before the war, but that means must be found to safeguard the interests of the native races. The solution, in Fraser's view, was the establishment of an international body which would supervise, but not administer, colonial territories and thus not infringe the sovereignty of the present owners.

**New Zealand's enthusiasm for such lines of thinking was naturally increased by the belief that the principles of trusteeship were strongly supported by the United States Government. In November 1944, for example, Fraser suggested to the British Government that the **United States** might make its acceptance of an international security organisation dependent upon the supervision of colonies by an international body, <sup>1</sup> and in April 1945 Berendsen for New Zealand expressed to the Commonwealth Conference the strong opinion that action must be taken to meet the suspicions, however unjustified, with which the Americans regarded British colonial policy. <sup>2</sup> His argument ran that 'unless some concrete step could be taken to remove the misconceptions prevalent not only among the American public at large, but particularly in the United States Senate', the success of the efforts then being made to build up a system of collective security would be gravely prejudiced.**

**Both the idealism and the opportunist calculations which caused New Zealand to support the principle of trusteeship were shared with **Australia**. The matter was referred to in the Canberra Agreement in clauses which were apparently due to New Zealand rather than to Australian initiative, and was discussed again at a conference between the two dominions held in **Wellington** in November 1944. It was then agreed between them that the international trusteeship body should be given the right to inspect dependent territories. This last suggestion had strong implications, and on the personal appeal of Sir Harry Batterbee, British High Commissioner, was represented in the published summary of conclusions by the comparatively innocuous statement that representatives of the trusteeship authority should visit dependent territories. Even so, the United Kingdom Government was extremely embarrassed by this dominion declaration of support for an active trusteeship body. In an unusually sharp comment, it expressed opposition to the 'control' of colonies by an international body and declared that 'in our view in a matter of this kind all members of the British Commonwealth ought to take every care to coordinate as far as possible their respective views before entering public declarations of**

**policy. We can only express our regret that this public announcement has been**

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**<sup>1</sup> NZ Minister of External Affairs to SSDA, 19 Nov 1944.**

**<sup>2</sup> ‘To Americans - by virtue of their past - Britain has remained the symbol of all Imperialism.’—Wilmot, p. 632.**

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**made on behalf of the Australian and New Zealand governments without any prior consultation with, or warning to us <sup>1</sup>.’ The replies of both Fraser and Evatt were, to say the least, unrepentant. They maintained firmly, though with differing degrees of tactfulness, their right both to form and to publicise dominion policy in the matter. Fraser explained, moreover, that his own views had been ‘made very plain’ at the Commonwealth Conference in London, and that they would be advocated by the New Zealand Government ‘when invited to express their opinion on the establishment of a general security organisation <sup>2</sup>.’ In the vigorous correspondence arising from this incident the two dominion governments were, perhaps, a little unmindful of the protests registered by themselves when the United Kingdom Government had recently proceeded without adequate consultation among members of the Commonwealth, and the British Government was obviously apprehensive lest dominion precipitancy might have prejudiced further negotiations concerning trusteeship.**

**Within a few weeks of this correspondence, however, the whole problem took on a dramatically different aspect. At Yalta, it seems, Churchill was confronted by a consensus of anti-colonial feeling uniting Roosevelt and Stalin, and indeed it seems that at this time some American eyes looked with even greater suspicion on British than on Russian intentions for the post-war world. <sup>3</sup> Accordingly, when Churchill was presented with suggestions for five-power discussions on the machinery for international trusteeship, he ‘exploded with wrath’ and declared that he would never ‘consent under any circumstances to the**



**United Nations** thrusting interfering fingers into the very life of the **British Empire.**' His notion was apparently that the Americans were proposing international control over colonial areas in general terms and including, therefore, British colonies. He was somewhat pacified, therefore, when they made it clear that they had in mind only the application of trusteeship to enemy territories, and not to any part of the **British Empire**; and he insisted that the point should be made quite clear. <sup>4</sup> Accordingly a secret protocol of the conference declared that consultation on trusteeship was to be subject to its limitation to **League of Nations** mandates, former enemy territory and other territories voluntarily placed under trusteeship; but there was no discussion of the actual territories which it was proposed should be brought under the new trusteeship arrangements. Churchill's view was thus made clear; and it was accepted by the Americans. By this time, the American

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<sup>1</sup> SSSA to NZ Minister of External Affairs, 14 Nov 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Minister of External Affairs to SSSA, 19 Nov 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Wilmot, p. 632.

<sup>4</sup> McNeill, p. 554; *Hopkins Papers*, Vol. II, p. 854.

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Government was no longer inclined to push the idea of trusteeship in its wider implications. To the grave disappointment of **Cordell Hull**, the issue had, on the insistence of the Chiefs of Staff, been shelved during the **Dumbarton Oaks** Conference. The leaders of the American services, more particularly the Navy, with influential support in Congress, had in fact forced their government to reconsider the boldly liberal attitude in the matter of colonial policy with which Roosevelt and Hull had been for long so intimately connected. <sup>1</sup> Concern for future bases had temporarily prevailed.

When the dominion delegates met in **London** in April, the Colonial



Secretary reported to them that at **Yalta** the **United States** officials had shown little if any interest in the improvement of administration for the benefit of native peoples. 'It was clear that they were principally concerned to seek ways and means of acquiring Japanese islands in a manner which would not adversely affect their own public opinion.' There had been signs at the end of 1944 that the British Colonial Office was prepared to consider a system of international supervision covering all dependent territories. <sup>2</sup> But in a statement to Parliament in March 1945 Churchill specifically excluded British colonial territories from any discussion on the matter. <sup>3</sup> Trusteeship was placed first on the agenda of a Commonwealth meeting so that it could be discussed before the **United Kingdom** took part in the five-power discussions on trusteeship, and Fraser and Evatt faced something like a firm agreement between the **United States** and the **United Kingdom**. They were not dismayed, but urged again that the British Commonwealth had nothing to fear from submitting to an international inquiry into its colonial administration, and emphasised that in their view this would not involve any interference with its sovereign rights. They were told that the British Government, anxious to meet in this matter the viewpoint of the Australian and New Zealand governments, had decided to accept the clause of the **Yalta** protocol which provided that parent states might voluntarily place non-mandated territories under mandate. The British, however, did not intend to apply this principle to their own colonies. Their view was that, if they did so, their example would not be followed by other states. They feared that it would create a feeling of impermanence and that many of the colonial peoples themselves would react unfavourably to such a change. Fraser was frankly dissatisfied with this position. He felt that the **United Kingdom** was in danger of abdicating its moral leadership in colonial affairs and that 'it would be

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<sup>1</sup> See McNeill, particularly p. 597, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> Colonial Office memorandum of 21 Dec 1944.

better for the **United Kingdom** government not to accept the principle of trusteeship at all than to accept it and refuse to apply it to their own territories <sup>1</sup>.' New Zealand would have to make its own position clear at the **San Francisco** Conference, where the **United Kingdom** might find itself 'isolated from the **United States** and in the bad company of the predatory colonial powers.'

In the British Commonwealth discussions in April, therefore, **Australia** and New Zealand stood together in expressing with some vigour as against British ideas the view that trusteeship, conceived in its widest implications, and including the conception of account-ability, was an element of first-class importance in planning for the post-war world. This disagreement with **Britain**, at least so far as New Zealand was concerned, extended to the fundamental character of an international organisation to preserve peace. The New Zealand view in 1944 and 1945 was, as it had been in 1936, that the Covenant of the **League of Nations** was a fundamentally sound basis on which to build. In August 1944 Carl Berendsen, then New Zealand Ambassador to **Washington**, had addressed the **United Kingdom** delegates to the **Dumbarton Oaks** Conference and used terms which he might well have found appropriate six or eight years earlier. 'If,' he said, 'we were to attempt to draw up a plan for a new organisation we would begin by taking a copy of the Covenant and a pencil, and we would not pencil very much.' The causes of the failure of the League, he said, were moral, not mechanical; it was not the fault of its structure but that 'the members of the League were not prepared to fulfil the undertakings that they had accepted.' Though the Covenant would have to be modified to bring in the **United States**, which had never joined the League, and **Russia**, which had been expelled from it, the smaller the changes made the more likely it would be, he thought, that the new organisation would function effectively.

This being so, he was highly critical of the British proposals as they

then stood. These, he said, amounted to 'very little more than an undertaking by the Four Great Powers to meet from time to time to discuss the situation as it appeared, and to decide what they thought might best be done, and in taking this course they expected the assistance and collaboration of the smaller powers.' In this situation 'the force to be put at the disposal of the new organisation .... was to be used, not in support of any pledges, rules or undertakings, or openly accepted principles of justice and peace, but to support the "ad hoc" decisions of unknown people, at unknown times, in unknown circumstances on unknown principles.' Berendsen believed 'there was throughout the world a vast reservoir

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase in quotation marks was used by Dr Evatt.

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of public opinion in favour of the automatic application of sanctions against aggressors which could be tapped now', but would not, he feared, 'be available in the unknown circumstances of the future.' Moreover, to exclude the effective collaboration of the smaller powers would be to create an organisation which would be 'the negation in the international field of those principles of democracy for which this war is being fought'; and there was grave danger that such an organisation would become 'merely another alliance with the obvious fate of all alliances.' He reminded delegates 'that we cannot expect the peace to be preserved by force in the long run unless we in our turn insist, because it is morally right to do so, and because from the most selfish and individual point of view of our own interests it is wise to do so, in endeavouring to level up the good things of the world between nations, just as most civilised countries are endeavouring to level them up today between their citizens <sup>1</sup>.'

These remarks are the most eloquent and comprehensive of the many presentations made during 1944 and 1945 of New Zealand's views on the matter, or at least of the views of the Prime Minister, of Berendsen, and of Fraser's advisers in the External Affairs Department.

In 1936 the ideals of the **League of Nations** had gripped the imagination not only of the Labour Party leaders, but of an important minority of New Zealanders both inside and outside the party. There is little convincing evidence for a similar wide currency of those ideals in 1944. The fact is, however, that Fraser held to them still and agreed substantially with the exposition of New Zealand policy made by Berendsen in August 1944 and on other occasions. Of the two men, Berendsen was perhaps the more doctrinaire. An important exchange of letters took place between them in June 1944 which indicated their agreement on points of substance, though with a suggestion that on points of detail Fraser would be comparatively pliant, or at least that he would be prepared for fluidity of interpretation. On a very controversial constitutional issue, for example, he reflected that 'even if at first the Council is the major authority in the new World Organization there will probably be a repetition of the experience of the League. The Council under the Covenant was to have been the pivot but the Assembly very soon came to exercise general supervision over all the work of the League, even on matters explicitly entrusted to the Council. In short the Assembly continually gained in prestige not because it was the sovereign body in the League but because it was the universal body <sup>2</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> NZ Minister, **Washington**, to Minister of External Affairs, 16 Aug 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZ Minister, **Washington**, 8 Aug 1944.

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In New Zealand's thinking, then, there was room enough for differences on points of detail. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister and his chief associates and advisers remained convinced that the new world security organisation should follow the same basic lines as they had advocated in the discussions surrounding the reform of the **League of Nations** in 1936. Moreover, their viewpoint on this matter aroused no serious political opposition. On this issue, then, Peter Fraser could in

**1944 and 1945 genuinely speak for New Zealand as he had done in those far-off days before the war. This time, however, he had behind him a rather weary acquiescence rather than the drive of an active and influential minority.**

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 23 – TRUSTEESHIP IN ACTION

## CHAPTER 23

### *Trusteeship in Action*

**THAT humane, democratic idealism to which the New Zealand Labour Government was dedicated, that belief in the essential soundness of the common man and in the creative power of good will, was grievously battered during the years 1935–45. The assessment of its comparative validity as a principle in political morals is not the task of this history; yet it must be recorded how realism, fear and hate, cupidity, folly and ignorance frustrated those who thought that by good will allied to justice it should be possible to prevent war, to define worthy war aims, and to lay down the basic pattern of a world without war. True, the drive towards social welfare remained perhaps the most universally accepted principle of public policy; but this was represented mainly by general and innocuous terms in preparatory work for the post-war world. The desirability of the freest possible flow of international trade as an element in world prosperity had been recognised in principle in the Atlantic Charter and afterwards, but was hedged about by reservations by everyone from the Americans downwards. It was all rather frustrating for the hopeful idealist. On the positive side, however, there was widespread and probably growing recognition of the duty of the wealthier and more ‘civilised’ countries to help those that were undeveloped. This was a line of thought allied to that which insisted that there should be an end to ‘colonialism’, and at its best could be summed up in the concept of ‘trusteeship’. It has already been noted that this concept had a long and somewhat chequered career in the attempts by the **United Nations** to define their war aims, and it had been expressed prominently in the Canberra Pact of 1944 between **Australia** and New Zealand. For New Zealand, trusteeship still seemed to give scope for frustrated idealism, and even to offer a field in which it could be demonstrated that her oft-stressed love of principle was not merely a matter of words. For her, moreover, trusteeship was no matter of mere theorising or of new experiment. She had in this field a long-established traditional interest, and prolonged experience which gave to her—or at least to her officials**



and spokesmen—a more than usually intimate acquaintance with the evolution of a major international problem.

This experience was in part related to the fact that for a century New Zealand has been a country of two races. In 1919 this fact was cited as showing that she was particularly well equipped to administer native peoples. In 1945 the facts of her racial history were better known and less complacently regarded. For good or ill, however, and often quite unknowingly, every New Zealander had as part of his national heritage an enrichment of personal experience which was relevant to the problems of relationship between different races. More directly, when it came to matters of international trusteeship, New Zealand had twenty-five years of experience in **Western Samoa**, experience which had been dearly bought whether the price be reckoned in terms of money,<sup>1</sup> of disappointment, or of the effort involved in effecting a fundamental change of policy.

In the peace conference of 1919 New Zealand's relations with **Western Samoa** forced her to take an active part in a major decision, the disposition of the colonial territories captured from **Germany**. It was a New Zealand force which had occupied—and still held—**Western Samoa**: the fact that it had sailed under Australian and French naval escort was not stressed. New Zealand troops were in charge and New Zealand administration had controlled the territory for five years. Behind these facts lay an established tradition of national interest, partly strategic and partly economic. **Samoa** had from time to time been regarded by many New Zealanders as a key point in their hopes of expanding influence among the **Pacific** islands, and it had often been urged on their behalf that potential enemies should be excluded from this part of the **Pacific** area. In 1919 that meant expressly that German rule should not be restored and, indeed, that the territory should not be among those islands entrusted to our then ally **Japan**.<sup>2</sup> For most New Zealanders who gave thought to the subject, the solution was probably annexation to the Empire, with **Britain** in charge and paying the bill.<sup>3</sup> For a small but influential minority, however, there was profit to be

made in **Samoa** as well as political fulfilment, if it should pass permanently into New Zealand hands: those thinking this way, wrote **H. E. Holland**, were ‘numerically weak but financially strong <sup>4</sup>.’

The problem was handled at **Versailles** by W. F. Massey, who was confronted by a sudden thrust of idealist sentiment voiced more especially by President Wilson. On the one hand, there was

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<sup>1</sup> Subsidies from the beginning of the mandate to 1931 totalled nearly £270,000. Since then the Samoan Government has approximately paid its way.— *Year-Book*, 1946, p. 774; Keesing, p. 489; NZ Institute of International Affairs, *Western Samoa*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Wall, *Massey and the Peace Conference*, unpublished thesis, p. 55, quoting *Round Table*, Vol. IX, p. 819.

<sup>3</sup> *Round Table*, December 1919, p. 818.

<sup>4</sup> *Samoa, A Story that Teems with Tragedy*, 1918.

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a firm Allied pledge against annexation of enemy territories; and on the other, the argument that self-determination (if not self-government) was a life-giving principle, valid for colonial territories as well as for the more sophisticated people of the old world. Massey was downright and realistic. He wanted **Samoa** to be annexed to New Zealand, not in his thinking as an ‘imperialist’ move, nor as an allocation of the spoils of victory. Even if **Samoa** had some economic value, this was negligible in relation to New Zealand's war expenses. The object was security, not profit. He rejected with sensible arguments any suggestion of divided control, and thought it would be a quite unreal proceeding to ask the natives whether they preferred British or German rule. Moreover, the Samoans were not the only people concerned in the matter: New Zealand had clearly an intimate interest in the future government of the territory. <sup>1</sup> He would probably have approved of administration by **Britain**

on behalf of the Empire; but in the existing circumstances annexation to New Zealand was the honest and sensible course.

Massey argued this case at **Versailles** with some persistence, if with less audacity than that shown by his colleague W. M. Hughes in making parallel demands for **Australia**; while his critics back in New Zealand were soothingly assured that the territory would require no garrison, that its trade was in fact valuable, and that the British authorities had spoken kindly of New Zealand's administration of the **Cook Islands**.<sup>2</sup> The upshot was a compromise, accepted a little reluctantly by dominion spokesmen at **Versailles**. The mandate system avoided annexation and established altruistic objectives of government, but provided that a C class mandate could be administered in much the same way as if it had been annexed.

When Massey brought back this solution from **Versailles**, he met with some criticism. Sir Joseph Ward in particular spoke feelingly of problems likely to arise with 'coloured races', particularly through the presence of indentured Chinese labour on the plantations. He doubted whether New Zealand was capable of dealing with 'internal differences in **Samoa**', and altogether wished that this batch of problems could have been left in the experienced hands of the Imperial government.<sup>3</sup> There were, moreover, those who thought that Massey had been presumptuous in behaving as if New Zealand were an independent nation, as well as those who regarded the territory as an unwanted responsibility. Indeed, New Zealand had not made up her mind about the matter.

One extreme judgment was expressed, rather surprisingly, in an official pamphlet. **Western Samoa**, it was blatantly claimed in

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<sup>1</sup> Wall, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 55, quoting *Dominion*, 10 Apr 1919.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 54, quoting *NZPD*, Vol. 184, p. 59.

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November 1919, was 'New Zealand's share of the fruits of victory.' The territory, it seemed, could grow all tropical produce 'to perfection' granted only that adequate labour was available. This would, of course, be provided by native Samoans, though they, unfortunately, 'will have to be educated up to the necessity to work.' Meantime, while the educational process was being accomplished, the necessary workers would be imported. <sup>1</sup> This cavalier approach to one of the most difficult problems of Pacific island development underlines the cautious judgment expressed by Lord Liverpool, Governor-General of New Zealand. On 4 December 1918 he took the interesting course of addressing the Secretary of State for Colonies on this general subject, noting that his views did not coincide with those of his Prime Minister, Massey. The Dominion, wrote Lord Liverpool, was 'hardly ready to possess detached dependencies of its own.' He went on to stress the problem of labour supply. Precedent seemed to show, on the one hand, that development of such a territory could only be accompanied by cheap native labour and, on the other, that this problem opened up immense difficulties. In his view, it would be likely to cause particularly awkward reactions in New Zealand, where the powerful Labour Party had already adopted what he called extreme views in such matters, and where, from a small population, it would be extremely difficult to find an Administrator entirely free from political bias. He pointed out, moreover, that it was only since 1914 that anything significant had been done for the development of the Cook Islands. <sup>2</sup> Indeed, so far as the administration of native affairs went, New Zealand's principal asset at this time was a vague and rather sentimental feeling that she had done well by the Maoris rather than any concrete experience.

Nevertheless, from the beginning, the sceptical views of the Governor-General and the quite unwarranted financial optimism of some merchants did far less than justice to the mainsprings of New Zealand's policy. Humanitarianism, though often obscured, was a force of fundamental importance in these attempts to achieve a sympathetic understanding of the Samoan viewpoint. 'In the first instance,' said New

**Zealand's first Minister of External Affairs, 'the duty of this country is to the Samoan people.' He went on to emphasise that Samoans were not lazy, that they worked as hard as was necessary to maintain their own standards, and that New Zealand's policy was to 'allow the Samoans to go on in the same way as they are doing now', aided mainly by public works, hospitals and kindred benefits. <sup>3</sup> The Minister did, indeed, contemplate the**

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**<sup>1</sup> *The Truth About Samoa*, Government Printer, November 1919.**

**<sup>2</sup> GGNZ to Secretary of State for Colonies, 4 Dec 1918.**

**<sup>3</sup> E. P. Lee, *NZPD*, Vol. 186, p. 798.**

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**importation of further Chinese labour to develop plantation agriculture, an idea strongly criticised by Apirana Ngata. The Samoans, said Ngata, were happy: 'Why do you not leave them alone and let them enjoy themselves in their own way? Is yours the only way in which a human being can enjoy himself? <sup>1</sup>'**

**In New Zealand in 1920, then, there were a few who hoped to make money out of Samoan trade, and there were many who thought that it would be good for the Samoans to work harder than they were accustomed to do; but those concerned with Samoan administration seem to have viewed the new problem with hazy, benevolent optimism. The idea that the Samoans should be exploited was, to most, repugnant. New Zealand's wish was to do good for the Samoans, not to make money out of them; but, not understanding very well her own experience in race relations, she only too often learnt the basic facts of Samoan life by the hard way of benevolent trial and tragic error.**

**In 1925, towards the end of General Richardson's first term as Administrator, New Zealand seemed to be the model mandatory power,**

promoting native welfare by public works, social services, and reform of land tenure and native administration. In such progress, it appeared, the foundations for ultimate self-government were being soundly laid. Nevertheless, the basic patterns of Samoan life held firmly, but quietly and at first unobtrusively, beyond the ken of New Zealand officials. In 1926 they emerged in the Mau, an 'opinion movement', which represented a strong—indeed a national—reaction against the administration. Its leadership was provided initially from the local European and mixed-blood sections of the community, whose position seemed to be threatened by New Zealand's firm preference for strictly native Samoan interests, but who worked in and through disaffected elements in traditional **Samoa**. The Mau thus built up a genuinely Samoan movement which was based upon traditional social and political organisation, and which confronted the Government with systematic and disciplined non-cooperation. If it began as a movement to remedy both local European and Samoan grievances, partly caused and partly accentuated by New Zealand administration, it developed into a movement to preserve the old Samoan ways against Europeanisation, and into a movement for national autonomy. With its roots deep in the past, and aspiring to a social and political order that was complex, and to European logic contradictory, it was baffling and intangible to an administration which had never established real contact with Samoan life.

The Mau's main objective was easy to define in very general

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<sup>1</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 186, pp. 935-6.

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terms: it favoured the principle of **Samoa** for the Samoans. Practical detail as to the form that a future Samoan government should take was not called for, so its energies could be consumed in the straightforward, negative task of obstructing the New Zealand administration. The Government, for its part, disappointed, well-meaning, and suddenly confronted by new, unexpected aspects of Samoan life, reacted neither

with sustained repression nor patient conciliation. Tolerance in the early stages, which assisted the movement to develop, was followed by ill-conceived 'police action', including the exile of leaders and a small but spectacular clash with bloodshed on 28 December 1929. Thereafter, as the police arrived, the men took to the bush and the hills. In 1930 there was a truce, but non-cooperation continued, and many of the Mau activities were carried out, without interference, by a women's Mau.<sup>1</sup> But order was maintained, and political quiescence gradually reasserted itself. Meantime New Zealand was plunged in the depression; and the advent of a Labour government at the end of 1935 gave a new turn to relations between New Zealand and **Western Samoa**. The time had come for different personal attitudes and for a new formulation of objectives.

All through the preceding troubled period Labour spokesmen had severely criticised New Zealand policy in **Samoa**, so that the leaders of the new government could fairly expect a fund of good will among the members of the Mau. They were also deeply committed to the principles embodied in the **League of Nations** and its mandate system: principles which extinguished the last vestiges of the notion that **Western Samoa** was permanent property, acquired as spoils of war. Previous governments had said firmly that 'nothing but the defeat of the British Empire in war can ever sever [the Samoans] from the Crown of England',<sup>2</sup> and that New Zealand 'has no intention whatever of surrendering, either now or in the future, any rights it possesses at present' under the Samoan mandate.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, Savage, as Prime Minister in 1937, regarded the status of **Samoa** as a matter which could properly be discussed: New Zealand, he said, could contemplate the possibility of returning its former colonies to **Germany** as part of a world settlement. Perhaps an element in this change of front was the recurrent notion that the mandate was a burden which in 1919 some thought should have been rejected, and which in later years many New Zealanders felt should be resigned at the first convenient opportunity. In the last few years before the war there was in New Zealand a widely held opinion that there were no economic and few strategic reasons

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<sup>1</sup> Keesing, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Francis Bell, 20 Dec 1924.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Coates in *East Africa*, 16 Dec 1926.

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why the mandate should be retained. <sup>1</sup> Yet official policy remained clear that the interests of the natives were paramount. Savage told the Imperial Conference of 1937 that no transfer of the territory to **Germany** could be considered without adequate safeguards for the welfare of the Samoans. He added, in words that could have been honestly used by any preceding government, that 'in any case New Zealand would regard the interests of the inhabitants as the first and primary consideration'.

In official policy, then, **Samoa** was a trust to be administered in the interests of world peace and of the natives themselves; while at cabinet level there was a change of emphasis arising from personal attitudes rather than from hard thinking. The new ministers had minds full of general friendliness towards subject peoples, as indeed towards everyone else, and an underlying faith in the possibility of such friendliness being translated into practical politics. Soon after taking office, the Government agreed to the return to **Samoa** of **O. F. Nelson**, exiled for his connections with the Mau, and sent to the islands a 'good will' mission, headed by a cabinet minister. The result was some minor change in legislation and constitutional arrangements. In particular, a large number of public offices, mainly of course concerned with native government and administration, were made elective. According to one experienced official this move was highly effective. It 'was the device by which the Mau lost its character of active opposition', as its officials became office holders. The changes amounted in practical terms to the restoration of local self-government to the Samoan village communities. Tension had died down so far that normal relationships between the New Zealand administration and the Samoan community were re-established. Nevertheless, beneath the relatively peaceful and friendly external



appearance there is little evidence that rebellion had been replaced by genuine warmth of co-operation.

When war threatened, the Samoan chiefs said that 'in spite of differences of opinion we support the government and the Union Jack over us', <sup>2</sup> and with 'strong expressions of loyalty to the Empire' they offered a 'force of 9,200 Samoans for general service and defence of Apia <sup>3</sup>.' The Administrator's comment was that while this offer was a fine and welcome gesture the 'action must not be misunderstood as to mean any loyalty towards us or, indeed, any wish to assist us in case of peril', <sup>4</sup> and he recounted

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<sup>1</sup> NZ Institute of International Affairs, *Western Samoa*, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of Fono of Faipule, 29 Sep 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Administrator to External Affairs (cable), 29 Sep 1938. A. C. Turnbull was for some years technically acting Administrator. It seems convenient to refer to him as Administrator throughout. It should be recalled that until 1943 the **Department of External Affairs** administered New Zealand's island territories. Relations with foreign and Commonwealth countries were handled by the Prime Minister's Department.

<sup>4</sup> Turnbull to Berendsen, 2 Mar 1939.

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the story of how in 1914 the Samoan chiefs welcomed the invading New Zealanders with almost the same breath that had bidden a sorrowful farewell to **Dr Schultz**. <sup>1</sup> For many Samoans, of course, possible participation in war was less of a political issue than a matter of potential excitement and profitable jobs. Moreover, reactions must have been to some extent influenced by the fact that **Western Samoa** was after all a mandate, in contrast with Eastern Samoa, which was a long-established American naval base. There is evidence enough that the

Western Samoans viewed the coming struggle with an understandable detachment.

This may have been to some small extent accentuated by the residuary influence of the German period. About a tenth of the white population was German and more than a sixth of the mixed population nominally so. From 1933 Nazi ideas had a certain vogue and a *Stutzpunkt* of the party was established in **Apia**. There seems to have been some debate as to whether Samoans were Aryans and, if not, 'how great a percentage of miscegenation with Samoan blood can still be regarded as equivalent to Aryan blood.' On 30 May 1937 **Dr Hellenthal**, first career German consul in **Wellington**, wrote to the German Consulate-General in **Sydney** asking for a ruling on this point and gravely reporting that 'the racial origins of the Samoans have not yet been precisely determined.' **Dr Hellenthal** had high hopes of what might be achieved in **Samoa**. When visiting **Samoa** in April 1937 he had realised that the Samoan Germans 'needed only some great common experience to weld them together again', and had provided this by a patriotic ceremony after which 'those who had been the bitterest enemies shook hands with one another'. Nor did he anticipate much opposition from New Zealand, which was 'the only mandatory power that might be expected to surrender its mandate without overmuch persuasion; indeed my opinion is that the country would be relieved to be rid once more of the responsibility for **Samoa**.'

Attempts to organise Nazi activity in **Western Samoa**, which were stimulated from the German consulate in **Wellington**, had some practical consequences. Suspicions at the time of the **Munich** crisis that the local Nazis might be planning an armed coup seem to have been mainly responsible for the formation of a small Samoan local defence force early in 1939, and a number of suspected Nazis were interned on the outbreak of war.

More important, however, than such superficial manifestations was the disposition on the part of the Samoans to regard the war as something external to their interests. 'We prayed for God's help, but

whether it is the will of God or the stubbornness of Europeans,

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<sup>1</sup> Administrator to External Affairs, 22 Sep 1939.

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war has begun,' said the spokesman of the Fono of Faipule to the Administrator on 13 September 1939. 'We still pray to God to end it. We thank your Excellency for your clear exposition of what has occurred. We consider such affairs should be left as the responsibility of the nations who have been unable to prevent war.' In this phase, for more reasons than one, it was the policy of the Government to keep Samoans out of the war.

The outbreak of war against **Japan** inevitably marked a revolution in Samoan life. In the first place, it raised acutely the problem of **Pacific** fighting. As things stood, **Samoa** was virtually defenceless. There were in fact in the territory at the time 44 men serving on a permanent basis and 106 part-time Territorials. Moreover, the principle was accepted that Samoans should not be armed. The Administrator and the Samoan chiefs themselves drew the deduction that in case of an invasion resistance would be futile and costly. 'Our people would suffer less if they remain quiet,' said a Samoan leader. 'We think, also, the fleets of **Britain** and U.S.A. will keep the enemy away from **Samoa** and we put our trust in God <sup>1</sup>.' The Government's decision, however, was that any attack should be resisted so far as was physically possible. Accordingly, such preparations for defence as could be made locally were pushed ahead. Far more important, however, than anything that New Zealand could do was the prospect of American intervention, which arose naturally from the proximity of the naval harbour of Pago Pago. As early as 7 January 1942 the Administrator was told that American Samoa was about to be strongly reinforced, and that if the Americans wished also to make use of the New Zealand islands they should be given every facility. <sup>2</sup> On 20 March following a full agreement was negotiated between the representatives of the two countries, and five days later an advance party of marines arrived. Their strength was rapidly built up, and till the

end of 1943 there were, on the average, 10,000 American servicemen, chiefly marines, stationed in **Western Samoa**.

After the first shock, therefore, the **Pacific** war meant for the Samoans not so much the fear of attack as the presence on their soil of an American army of occupation. This, as elsewhere, had a strong social and economic impact. The Americans needed a large labour force and hired it direct from the villages. Minimum rates of pay were agreed upon between the Americans and the Administrator, who remarked that 'as far as can be ascertained' actual payments were 'reasonable although probably higher than would be paid by the Administration.' Behind this cautious phrase lay the

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<sup>1</sup> Administrator to External Affairs, 7 Feb 1942.

<sup>2</sup> PM to Administrator, 7 Jan 1942.

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fact that the number of Samoans working for wages was very greatly increased, and that wage rates throughout the Territory were forced up by American standards. Moreover, the spending of the marines put a great deal of money into circulation, <sup>1</sup> while American road-building and other public works gave startling examples of what could be done quickly. On any reckoning there was widespread change in the community. In economic terms this may have been of an ephemeral character. Samoans who were unaccustomedly handling money spent it apparently in Samoan style rather than in equipping themselves to live the European-style life. The social effect of such spending is, indeed, impossible to assess accurately. Yet available facts and plentiful analogies from other **Pacific** areas suggest that the American impact on **Samoa's** exceptionally conservative society must have been substantial.

It is not surprising, accordingly, that the same period was marked by a revival of political restlessness. No causal relation between wartime social change and renewed interest in self-government has been proved.

The underlying rhythm of Samoan life might well at this time have produced such developments independently of specifically wartime experiences. Under war conditions, however, indications of a continued preoccupation with local politics multiplied and there was nothing in the wartime situation, or even in the wartime prosperity, to divert the attention of politically minded people from their own internal problems. The presence of American forces could even sharpen the problem by reminding Western Samoans of the difference in conditions in neighbouring islands, with an implicit suggestion that those under American administration were better off. In 1947, for example, it was reported that thinking along these lines was noticeable in those areas where 'free-spending American forces were encamped during the war period', <sup>2</sup> and in 1943 there was some feeling among New Zealand administrators that the Americans on their side were 'covetous of **Western Samoa**.' Though there is no evidence that New Zealand and the **United States** were seriously played off against each other, some alert individuals did see a tactical advantage in the possibility that 'another Power would treat them better.' There may also have been some revival of the old idea that Samoan dignity would be better served by attachment to a great power than to a small one.

There was, then, in **Western Samoa** from 1942 onwards a growing and audible demand for self-government, a demand by no means silenced by New Zealand paternalism. In 1944 that which had long been familiar to experts was made explicit. In June of that year the

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<sup>1</sup> Imports into **Western Samoa** increased thus: £154,000 (1941), £300,000 (1942), £606,000 (1943).— *A to J*, 1945, A4, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Report of United Nations Mission, 1947, p. 18.

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Governor-General, Sir Cyril Newall, paid his third visit to the territory, and Samoan spokesmen, while welcoming him on behalf of the

**Fono of Faipule, expressed solid criticism of New Zealand policy. The Samoans, said Fonoti, had been denied even that element of self-government which had been established in [Tonga](#) and [Fiji](#) and in Eastern Samoa. 'The terms of the mandate have imposed on New Zealand the solemn duty of educating the Samoans to self-government and the terms of the Atlantic Charter express the same aim for the small nations of the world. Thirty years have passed since New Zealand took over [Western Samoa](#) and we are appreciably no nearer this goal. We wish to assure your Excellency that the Samoan people are loyal to the Union Jack, His Majesty the King and the British Empire, but after thirty years of New Zealand administration during which our justified aspirations were ignored and our requests for improvements were rejected, we have lost confidence in the trusteeship of New Zealand which has shown a lack of interest in the territory and treated its people as stepchildren.' In the Governor's phrase, 'a nettle is appearing.'**

**In the month that followed, political activity continued, and the Faipule formed a standing committee to keep in touch with the workings of the administration: a move with sinister precedents. In the view of an experienced observer it was 'not far removed from the formation of another Mau.' By this time, however, it was known that the Prime Minister himself was about to visit the mandated territory. He was known to have a keen personal interest in its administration, of which since 1940 he had been the ministerial head; but the tremendous pressure of war issues during the ensuing years had kept his main attention elsewhere. In 1944, as the war situation eased and as politics in [Western Samoa](#) grew more tense, he carried out a long-deferred intention to discuss the matter on the spot with those most concerned. This visit of Peter Fraser to [Western Samoa](#) and his discussions with a special Fono of Faipule in December proved a crucial event in New Zealand's relations with the Samoans and in the evolution of New Zealand's conception of trusteeship.**

**In the first place, the Samoans formulated their political demands for themselves, as well as for the [New Zealand Government](#), with**

unmistakable clarity. The Faipule presented to the Prime Minister a list of remits, most of which were detailed and aimed at progressive displacement of Europeans by Samoans in administration, but which was headed by a firm request for self-government after the war.

The Samoan spokesman, Fonoti, told Fraser frankly that he was 'quite convinced that the Samoans are able to have their own government at the present time. The only obstacle that we think is in the way is the communication with other countries. We are quite able to run our own affairs in **Samoa**'; but obstacles had always been put in the way of such overseas contacts. 'As regards the government of the people and preservation of the peace, many years ago the Samoans had their own forms of government before the Europeans set up government in this country,' he said. 'These governments functioned very successfully'—except when Europeans interfered. Moreover, 'at that time the Samoans had no education whatever, nowadays they have a fair amount of education, they have a very good understanding of affairs and they are quite able to control their own government.'

Such demands were part of a political evolution which involved a re-assessment by the Samoans of the recent past—New Zealand was now criticised for dropping the progressive policies of General Richardson—and was none the less important because its professed haste was unrealistic, or because the New Zealand administration doubted whether the Faipule were genuinely representing the considered wishes of the Samoan community. Right or wrong, there was dangerous material about, of the kind which in the past had produced disastrous political explosions. The resurgent crisis was handled, however, by a government whose attitude was benevolent, and which was committed deeply, if vaguely, to the principles of trusteeship. When he met the Fono in December, the Prime Minister was conciliatory. 'New Zealand,' he said, 'had laid upon her after the Great War of 1914–18 the mission, the trusteeship, of **Samoa** and its people and it was understood that **Samoa** would be administered not for the benefit of New Zealand or anyone else but for the benefit of **Samoa**....I regret that in the years that have gone



serious mistakes were made and enormities were raised and the people were divided through lack of understanding or appreciation of the difficulties peculiar to the country....I want you to feel that the **New Zealand Government** wants to administer this trusteeship along with you as co-trustees for the future of this country.' At a later stage, he was somewhat more explicit. He took up a Samoan reference to the right of self-government endorsed in the Atlantic Charter for nations big and small—'We have learnt about this, and it has been confirmed by you, Sir, in the Parliament of New Zealand'—and added to it the obligations written into other international documents. 'Under the mandate and our New Zealand Australia Agreement we are pledged to promote the training and education of Samoans so that they can take an increasing part in the Administration and finally be able to assume self-government.' He said frankly that, in the past, 'more could have been done to train Samoans for official responsibility.' As for the future, he hammered home the point that progress depended on friendship and co-operation between New Zealand and the Samoan people, and more precisely on education. 'The New Zealand Government will be pleased,' he said, 'when it is possible for all the important Administration offices to be filled by fully trained, educated and efficient Samoans but in administering our trust we must ask for and insist upon equal training and efficiency, otherwise we will be betraying the Samoan people as a whole.' There is no evidence that his words pacified those Samoans who were demanding political power or that it diminished their pressure. The impression of his personal sincerity, however, may well have been a factor in preventing opposition from reverting to non-cooperation.

In general terms New Zealand's programme was defined as closely as was possible on the occasion of the Prime Minister's visit. In fact, however, its essential elements remained good will rather than detailed planning. 'The new Government in 1936 adopted a new policy, which it always believed in when it was not the Government, a policy of reconciliation, friendship, progress and promotion of the economic social welfare of **Samoa**.' So Fraser summarised the position to the Samoans in December 1944. Welfare, in other words, remained a vital



consideration; and the Prime Minister was not concerned on this occasion to deal with the possible incompatibility between welfare and the then so-publicised aim of self-government. He was very probably only feeling his own way towards a judgment on the matter.

New Zealand did not and could not claim that her policy over thirty years had done much to prepare the Samoans to govern or administer themselves along western lines. She could, however, have claimed quite fairly that the Samoans had, in the upshot, been treated as Sir Apirana Ngata in 1920 had wished—they had been allowed to live their own life without exploitation and without being ‘improved’ against their will: a result that was important even if derived not from basic principles of colonial administration, but from a desire to promote quiet, and to avoid a recurrence of that disagreeable situation when Samoan affairs were both an intensely awkward problem at home and a source of embarrassing publicity abroad. As it was, Samoan life, the Trusteeship Committee was told, ‘is still lived as Samoan life (not as labourers, waiters or in menial work) and this despite the fact that population had doubled under New Zealand rule.’ And again: ‘In Western Samoa...the indigenous social organization is so well preserved that every village is completely autonomous, supported not by law but by the force of social sanction.’

The converse of this situation was that central government scarcely existed, and gave no training to budding politicians. The islands had for ten years existed, not unhappily, outside the stream of world politics. This position could not continue. The Samoans, it could well be argued, were enjoying self-government in the only sense that mattered to them, but this was no longer the point. The Samoan leaders, whether as a development in traditional Samoan politics or whether in response to the spirit of the times, had demanded autonomy; and the Labour Government, which was both generally sympathetic to such aspirations and determined, in particular, to avoid a recurrence of the Mau, was bound to do something about it.

The task of definition was in the first instance handled on an

international scale at the **San Francisco** Conference to which Peter Fraser voyaged shortly after his visit to **Apia**. By this time not only was New Zealand known for forthright and fairly extreme views on trusteeship, but her Prime Minister had taken into his own hands the application of general principles to New Zealand's particular problem in **Samoa**. Her position, and Fraser's personal qualities, were recognised in his election to the chairmanship of the United Nations Committee dealing with the whole matter of trusteeship. New Zealand thus found herself in an unaccustomed position, presiding over deliberations instead of endeavouring to exert a small power's influence from the perimeter. In much of the trusteeship discussion, therefore, her characteristic views, though well known, were pressed by others—notably **Australia**<sup>1</sup>—rather than directly by her own spokesmen. Nevertheless, on the warm testimony of **E. R. Stettinius**, then Secretary of State, Fraser personally found opportunity to play an influential part in proceedings. 'No one at the Conference,' he wrote to Fraser, 'has brought higher ideals to our work nor more persistence in seeking to give effect to them. The Chapter on Trusteeship, which owes so much to your guidance, will, I am confident, prove to be one of the most historic of our achievements. You have contributed much to making it a sure basis for the advancement and welfare of untold millions.'

'I sincerely trust that the many improvements in the Charter for which your efforts have been responsible will be a source of enduring satisfaction to you. It has been an honour and a privilege to be associated with you in this work<sup>2</sup>.'

Australian pressure was, in fact, partly responsible for the width and generosity of Articles 73 and 74, which applied to all non-self-governing territories; but on one significant point Australian initiative was unsuccessful. The proposal that all powers administering such territories should make reports to the **United Nations** on their general development was whittled down to a request for technical

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. address by Fraser on 28 Oct 1948.— *International*

<sup>2</sup> Stettinius to Fraser, 23 Jun 1945.

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and statistical information. On the broader issue, the Australians were by no means satisfied with the procedure which merely made it possible for powers holding territories which were neither League mandates nor former enemy property voluntarily to place them under trusteeship. In spite of Australian pressure, however, the Charter as finally drafted did not even lay it down that all mandated or ex-enemy territories must be brought under the new system. On these issues New Zealand was in general accord with **Australia**; for at this time the two dominions had a common attitude, and took pains to co-ordinate their thinking.

In the formative discussion on trusteeship, then, New Zealand was, in part, muzzled by her chairmanship of the relevant committee, but her ideas were not unexpressed, and the documents in this field represented the kind of compromise that might have been expected between small power and great power attitudes. The effort to get all colonial territories brought within the scope of trusteeship was signally defeated; yet all members of the **United Nations** holding such territories subscribed to a statement of principles with a solid humanitarian core. Under Article 73, the interests of the inhabitants of all non-self-governing territories is declared to be paramount. Subject only to the need to maintain international peace and security, all administering powers promise to promote the 'political, economic, social and educational advancement' of such territories, and specifically to guide them towards self-government. Article 74 lays down that, in respect of colonial no less than of metropolitan territories, the policy of members of the **United Nations** 'must be based on the general principle of good-neighbourliness, due account being taken of the interests and well-being of the rest of the world, in social, economic and commercial matters.' Benevolence and international co-operation were, then, the keynotes, and they were

**sounded even more strongly in**

**Chapter XII** of the Charter, which defined the manner of dealing with those territories which any nation should place under the International Trusteeship system. The basic objectives of the system were declared to be:

- ( To further international peace and security;  
a)
- ( To promote the political, economic, social, and educational  
b) advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement;
- ( To encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms  
c) for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and to encourage recognition of the interdependence of the peoples of the world; and
- ( To ensure equal treatment in social, economic, and commercial  
d) matters for all members of the **United Nations** and their nationals, and also equal treatment for the latter in the administration of justice.

The ideals were generous, though imprecise; but it was made very clear that there was no binding obligation on any power to place any territory under the system; that if any territory should be so placed, this would be done by individual agreement; and that any colonial territory could be classed as a strategic area and thus lifted into the ken of the Security Council and out of that of the Trusteeship Council. Moreover, in contrast with the mandates system, trust territories were expressly included in the military provisions of the new security system.

In short, trusteeship was not ungenerously defined, but it would exist only if countries with colonial territories invoked it, and expressly negotiated agreements to bring it into being. The force behind it, so Fraser characteristically hoped, would be the realisation on the part of administering powers 'that it is their moral responsibility to promote the well being of the peoples under their care, and this applies to the treatment of all non-self-governing peoples, whether they are within or

without the confines of the metropolitan state <sup>1</sup>.' So far as New Zealand was concerned, it was clear that she intended to bring **Western Samoa** into the new system. Fraser's attitude was plainly that New Zealand should not only do the decent thing in that territory but be recognised as so doing by world opinion as now mobilised in the **United Nations Organisation**: a course of action, incidentally, which appeared to be right in principle, and at the same time offer the most practicable means of dealing with the existing situation in **Western Samoa**. <sup>2</sup> The formal decision was taken by cabinet on 18 December 1945, and the offer conveyed to the first meeting of the General Assembly on the 31st of the same month; this being the first offer made by any country to operate the new trusteeship system. <sup>3</sup> New Zealand made it clear that, while the trusteeship agreement was being negotiated, she would 'continue to administer **Western Samoa** in accordance with the terms of the Mandate' in the interests of the inhabitants. <sup>4</sup>

The drafting of the agreement raised problems, and threw light on some of New Zealand's fundamental attitudes. There was a current of opinion, for example, that New Zealand, having pushed the notion of trusteeship so hard, should go more than the minimum

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<sup>1</sup> *International Conciliation*, 1948, p. 660.

<sup>2</sup> 'Only a dramatic movement towards self-government can satisfy the aspirations of the people.'—Report of United Nations Mission, 1947, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, 1 Jan 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZHC, **London**, 13 Apr 1946.

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distance in dealings with her own territories. Cabinet turned down the suggestion that the **Cook Islands** should be brought under the new system: legally they were an integral part of New Zealand territory, and,

apart from **Western Samoa** itself, the only islands regarded as being possibly suitable for trusteeship were the Tokelaus. In discussions on the draft Samoan agreement, some embarrassment was caused by American policy. The Charter laid down that 'other powers directly concerned' must be consulted, and agree to the terms of every trusteeship agreement. The United States was clearly involved, both under this general provision, and because of those dealing with strategic areas. The United States did, in fact, propose in February a bilateral agreement with New Zealand involving the declaration of Upolu as a strategic area, the construction of bases for use by American, New Zealand, British and Australian forces, and the recognition of the American Government's right to take control of all defence facilities in **Western Samoa** 'if in its judgment conditions at any time make such action necessary.' This request was part of a plan to strengthen **America's** line of strategic bases in the **Pacific** by obtaining rights over a number of islands, including seven under New Zealand sovereignty; and it revived an aspect of American policy which had disturbed New Zealand on the eve of the war. The United States, it was felt by some influential New Zealanders, was combining a 'traditional approach to problems of colonial administration' which was 'highly idealistic' and 'in some respects unreal' with a request for 'military base rights on terms...not in the best interests of the Samoans.' Further, New Zealand was inclined to think that the problem had wider interest than did the **United States**. The Americans at first suggested that only they together with New Zealand were directly concerned, though they readily conceded an interest to **Australia** and, with hesitation, to **Britain**.

New Zealand had a realistic appreciation of the reasons against resisting a course on which the American Government was determined. Accordingly, her representatives told the **United States** frankly that she could have the bases she required, whether or not a bilateral agreement was negotiated, but that they meant to resist strongly the proposed procedure. They felt that it would be wrong in principle to push ahead with such an agreement. 'The utmost significance was attached by New Zealand,' they said, 'to the "moral" considerations regarding this and

every other international problem.' They accordingly urged that American requirements could be met under a normal Trusteeship Agreement, and that any bilateral understanding should be deferred until the Trusteeship Agreement had been submitted to the **United Nations Organisation**. In particular, they strongly opposed the suggestion that any part of **Western Samoa** should become a strategic area, an idea popular with the American service chiefs precisely on the ground that it would enable American interests to be better protected through the **United States'** 'special rights and privileges' in the Security Council. New Zealand's attitude was explained to American officials in February and reiterated in July, when the draft Trusteeship Agreement for **Western Samoa** was formally submitted to 'the states directly concerned.' By this time, however, the United States Government had sharply changed its view on the need for bases in **Pacific** islands. Pressure for a strategic area in **Samoa** ceased, and it was agreed that negotiations for military rights should be postponed till the Trusteeship Agreement had been approved.

Meanwhile, the Trusteeship Agreement had been drafted. The New Zealand cabinet approached the problem with customary idealism. A Trusteeship Agreement, it remarked, 'should be a message to the inhabitants as well as...to the administering authority.' It should be 'in effect a self-contained Bill of Rights for the inhabitants of the territories and should be capable of being understood by them as such.... The inhabitants of a trust territory should feel that a Trusteeship Agreement is the Charter of conditions under which they will live and an advance on the...terms of the Mandates <sup>1</sup>.' As drafting proceeded it was influenced, said those concerned, by four major considerations: the interests of the Samoans; the provisions of the United Nations Charter relating to trusteeship; the desirability of following as closely as possible the form of the mandate; and the need for the agreement to be acceptable to the 'states directly concerned.' New Zealand regarded these states as being **Australia**, **France**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States of America**, but in accordance with the Canberra Pact submitted the draft to **Australia** some time before the others. As regards **Britain**,



the **New Zealand Government** had before it a draft agreement prepared by the **British Government** for Tanganyika and other territories, and it knew well enough the general attitude of the **United States**.

Its plan, adopted in early June, was that the draft, when approved by the 'states directly concerned', should be submitted to the New Zealand Parliament, and thereafter to the Legislative Council of **Western Samoa**. This timetable, however, proved impossible. A terminal date was fixed by the need to have the agreement approved by the forthcoming Assembly of the **United Nations Organisation**, lest there be insufficient agreements concluded to enable the trusteeship procedure to be launched. Discussion with the 'states directly concerned' took so long that Parliament adjourned before it was

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZHC, **London**, 13 Jan 1946.

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completed, and the final draft could not be placed before the Samoan Legislative Council and the Fautua until the end of October, virtually simultaneously with its submission to the **United Nations**. This was a development naturally much resented by the Samoans.

The length of the discussions which produced this delay, and the thoroughness with which the draft was examined by the **United Nations Organisation**, were due, not to local conditions in **Western Samoa** or to the territory's relations with New Zealand, but to the international implications of this first attempt to define the character of trusteeship. For example, at one time the Americans attached great importance to the general principle of 'the open door', which some New Zealanders feared might lay the Samoans open to commercial exploitation, and the destruction of their particular way of life in favour of the doubtful blessings of a money economy. In 1945, it seemed, less than 2000 of a potential labour force of 25,000 were working for wages. American officials even claimed that the best interests of the Samoan people 'can only be served adequately if the principles of free enterprise are adopted in the area.' On the other hand, the clause in the draft agreement

enabling New Zealand to give the **United States** the bases which she desired caused some uneasiness both to the British and the French governments. New Zealand for her part seemingly strove to keep the interests—if not the immediate wishes—of the Samoans at the centre of the discussion; though she was fully aware of the enormous weight that the **United States** could exert both in the framing and in the operation of international agreements.

The Trusteeship Agreement for **Western Samoa** was approved by the General Assembly of the **United Nations** on 13 December 1946. Its details belong to the history of self-government in **Samoa**, of trusteeship and 'anti-colonialism', not of New Zealand at war. So does the action taken in the post-war period to translate its generous and ambitious principles into practice. Strictly speaking, the end of hostilities found New Zealand's Samoan policy still undefined. The mere decision to adopt trusteeship did not carry with it the two important political decisions: the speed and strategy of progress towards self-government, and the balance to be held between economic and political evolution. Yet in a real sense the principles which must in the last resort control further developments had been firmly established by the end of 1945. What followed was the working out of trends which ran back not only into the wartime period but far beyond that into New Zealand's fundamental attitudes. Moreover, not only had general principle been reaffirmed, it had to some extent been embodied in practical details.

In the first place, by 1945 the **New Zealand Government**, with Fraser as its driving force, was convinced that action of some kind was necessary. This conviction showed in Fraser's visit to **Samoa** in 1944, and in the appointment in October 1945 of Colonel F. W. Voelcker to succeed Sir Alfred Turnbull, who had administered **Western Samoa** for ten years. A man who soon reached the conclusion that the state of affairs in **Samoa** was 'a mess' and that 'something will have to be done and done quickly' had been chosen to succeed an Administrator whose policy, at least in later years, had been one of allowing the Samoans to run their local affairs with a minimum of interference from **Apia**. True,

Fraser, it seemed, had not yet made up his mind finally as to the 'something' that should be done. When Voelcker asked for instructions, he was told, he said later, that 'other than allowing the Samoans to live the life they wished in the manner they wished, I was to form my own conclusions about local problems'. Nevertheless, in the setting of 1945, it seemed clear that Samoan affairs could imperatively claim the Prime Minister's attention. The period of drift and of attempted casual and temporary solutions was closing.

In the second place, for all Fraser's reluctance to define a policy till forced to act by external pressures, the basis of his ultimate decision was already established. It lay not only in actions taken but in his general attitude—and in the general attitude of his cabinet and his party and probably of New Zealand as a whole—towards human and political problems. If the dilemma should arise of choice between efficient government and self-government, or between economic and political progress, Fraser could not have opted to impose benevolent rule by force. He said so in almost so many words a few months after Voelcker's appointment. As it soon appeared, Voelcker thought that the Samoans needed firm, considerate government and a vigorous policy of education and public works, not the appeasement of political leaders who were demanding a degree of self-government for which the community was not prepared. Faced with the expression of these opinions, Fraser made it clear that in his view good will was more important than efficiency, and that 'progress' could only be made if the government had the confidence of the governed.

Self-government, in short, must if necessary have precedence over good government, and the chief regulative factor in policy-making was to be the maintenance of good will between the two races, rather than the principle of material efficiency in public administration. Thus far the basis of future action was clear. One other fact, however, was made clear by New Zealand's whole wartime experience: the time-lag between acceptance of principle and the achievement of definitive action. In general terms, New Zealand governments normally proceed by tackling

day-to-day problems, and are fortunate if out of such activity a broad strategy emerges. In particular, problems of dependent territories ranked low in government preoccupations and notably below external affairs. Planned and sustained effort to apply promptly to **Western Samoa** the ideals which had been accepted and the general policy which had been adopted by 1945 would have been out of character. At the end of the war, accordingly, it was clear enough what New Zealand proposed to do about **Western Samoa**, and it was clear what principles would guide her decisions. What was still obscure was the pace at which she proposed to move towards the accepted goal of Samoan self-government, and by what detailed means. Wartime developments, however, gave reasonable ground for the claim that, in her dealings with this major dependent territory, New Zealand took seriously, whether or not she applied effectively, those ideals of trusteeship which she had so strenuously advocated in the forum of the **United Nations**.

# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 24 – WELFARE AND PEACE

## CHAPTER 24

### *Welfare and Peace*

**ANXIOUS** debate about the future of dependent territories arose inevitably from some of the more generous promptings of current western liberalism. Even more universal was acceptance of social welfare as an objective for the whole of mankind. Wartime sufferings sharpened the challenge, and made unmistakable the necessity for international action. Moreover, the relief of distress was a practical and (it could be hoped) a feasible task of immediate critical importance, as well as an obvious contribution towards long-term welfare. Accordingly it so happened that relief, reconstruction and welfare became the first major field in which international cooperation was developed in wartime without the imperatives of military necessity, and in terms which gave a foretaste of future problems. Seen retrospectively, it was a trial run between the West and the Russians in work which all could agree was utterly desirable, and in which, on the face of things, political differences should have had minimum importance. Incidentally, too, it was work in which New Zealand had special interest, both in its machinery and in its underlying ideology.

Since early colonial days, belief in the sovereign virtues of economic well-being has been a deep-rooted factor in New Zealand's thinking-and a remedy, as Seddon told Joseph Chamberlain and Savage told Neville Chamberlain, for international as well as for domestic tensions. In November 1939 the **New Zealand Government** bracketed welfare with morals as essential war aims: 'we are fighting for a moral issue, .... to institute the rule of law ... and to increase the welfare of the people. No peace is worth while which does not result in raising the living standards of the people.' The Labour government of neighbouring **Australia** had a somewhat similar outlook. The same principle was represented, in a negative form, in Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms' of January 1941, and in July the British Government, in approving the 'Freedoms', specifically forecast plans to cut the roots of fear by promoting freedom from want. A few days later Roosevelt and Churchill

framed the terms of the Atlantic Charter. The draft was considered in the very early hours of 12 August by a meeting of the British War Cabinet attended by Fraser, who was then in **London**. On Churchill's insistence, <sup>1</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> McNeill, p. 448.

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American free trade clause had already been qualified by respect for 'existing obligations' which protected Imperial preference; and the War Cabinet now asked for some further amendments in the references to economic policy. In particular, it wanted a new paragraph favouring 'collaboration in the economic field with the object of securing for all peoples freedom from want, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security <sup>1</sup>.' The final text of the charter was published in New Zealand on 15 August, with a lyrical comment. This 'modern charter of human liberties,' said Walter Nash, as acting Prime Minister, pointed the way clearly 'to a fuller and freer and happier life for the mass of the people of the earth.' There was to be no discrimination between victors and vanquished, and 'the major standards raised-namely economic advancement, improved labour standards, and social security for all nations-will, when the conflict is over, open the way to cultural and spiritual objectives-the striving towards which brings the abundance of life which is the rightful heritage of all human beings <sup>2</sup>.' The interpretation was over-enthusiastic, yet the concept of welfare was indeed firmly embedded in the Atlantic Charter, which in turn was endorsed in the Declaration by the **United Nations** in January 1942. This document, incidentally, was signed on behalf of New Zealand by Frank Langstone, acting under the powers conferred on him for the purpose by the King: a small sign that New Zealand was becoming conscious of diplomatic niceties.

Acknowledgment of principle was one thing, however, and its practical application quite another: **Europe** lay under German domination and 'prospects of victory seemed infinitely remote.' As



fighting dragged out, the most urgent problem appeared as that of famine relief, which would have to precede long-term reconstruction. Churchill had recognised this as early as August 1940, when he promised that **Britain** would undertake relief in liberated **Europe**, and appointed an authority to accumulate surpluses for the purpose.<sup>3</sup> Not much could be achieved at that time of crisis. A year later, however, the British Government pushed the matter further with a suggestion which was perhaps the effective germ of UNRRA; the first and in some ways the most fruitful of broadly based international organisations, which for some years drew together constructively the kindness and self-interest of the countries dominating the **United Nations**. The British suggestion was that representatives of all the Allied governments should meet in **London** to consider the matter, and to plan machinery for co-operation. This machinery, it was proposed, should start with a central bureau to

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser to Nash, 12 Aug 1941.

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Post*, 15 Aug 1941.

<sup>3</sup> McNeill, p. 313.

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be set up by the British Government to receive estimates of what would be needed, and present practical proposals to an inter-allied committee. The proposed meeting was duly held in **London** on 24 September 1941, and there followed just two years of complicated negotiations to transform national into international effort. These discussions gave New Zealand experience of a new type of international activity. While the great powers hammered out the awkward problems of their own co-operation, New Zealand gradually found her feet in a context where she had an individual standing, as well as her status as a member of the British Commonwealth.

From the first, then, UNRRA had a twofold character. It was a great benevolent agency, an instrument of world-wide scale for the promotion

of welfare. As such, it especially concerned New Zealand. 'Welfare,' it was claimed, 'is a subject on which New Zealand can probably make as great a contribution as any country in the world', <sup>1</sup> and UNRRA appeared to some New Zealanders as one of the essential instruments by which 'the right thinking world' could perhaps solve the problem of saving enemy peoples from collapse without condoning their crimes. <sup>2</sup> Humanity and morals apart, however, UNRRA was also an early and instructive experiment in international organisation. As the weaker powers quickly observed with some alarm, it would provide a model for future and perhaps more permanent institutions. Awkward precedents might be set, <sup>3</sup> and in particular the great powers might well be confirmed in their habit of laying down the law for the rest of the world and expecting the smaller nations to follow on. Clear lines of policy-making, again, even in a field where there was overwhelming agreement on objectives, might become sadly distorted by international suspicions, by accidental misunderstandings and by pressures arising from purely domestic issues. Finally, in the cut and thrust of practical politics, long-term objectives sometimes imperceptibly changed. In this case, thinking fluctuated between short-term emergency relief and long-term planning, while cross-currents flowed in the form of suggestions that levels of relief should somehow be related to the past or present political behaviour of recipient communities, and even to the willingness of displaced persons to return to their countries of origin.

These problems were illustrated from the beginning. Their unravelling belongs to the history of UNRRA and of the relations between the **United States of America** and the Soviet Union rather than to that of New Zealand. Her politicians and officials were interested observers rather than active participants-'we did

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<sup>1</sup> NZ Legation, **Washington**, to Secretary of External Affairs, 11 Nov 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Berendsen to Minister of External Affairs, 11 Oct 1944.

<sup>3</sup> NZHC, **London**, to Secretary of External Affairs, 2 Sep 1943.

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not open our New Zealand mouths on this issue <sup>1</sup>-at least until proposals had reached a detailed form. This was in mid-1943. On 10 June the **United States** sent to all **United Nations** governments a draft agreement for UNRRA, with the significant note that it had been approved by the big four and was to be published the following day. It was greeted with something like a chorus of protest by small European powers, who resented its 'great power' quality and criticised in particular the provision that its central committee should represent the big four only. They evidently feared that this manner of doing things might become the habit of the post-war world. Some small changes were made to meet-though they by no means removed-small-power criticism, and the United States Government sent out a final draft on 24 September 1943. Even those who still felt uneasiness agreed with reasonable cheerfulness to accept it, specifying, in one case, that this was no precedent. The agreement was ceremonially signed by members of the **United Nations** on 9 November.

New Zealand was, of course, an active participant in these preliminary negotiations and in the Council meeting which immediately followed the official signing of the agreement. She acted both in her own right and as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Consultation within the Commonwealth was close both by telegraph and in more or less formal gatherings of representatives. New Zealand did not, however, make much effort to alter the development of negotiations, and on the whole stood with **Britain's** viewpoint; she was not one of those who assaulted great-power domination. In this matter experiences relating to UNRRA bore fruit, if anywhere, in Fraser's attitude in the more fundamental negotiations concerning the **United Nations Organisation**. So far as UNRRA itself was concerned, New Zealand's participation was rather at the official and expert level, active in working out details and keeping plans to a practical character. She

was, in this preparatory stage, an observer and quietly co-operative, not a policy-maker. Her role was, in fact, reminiscent of her pre-war habits-and a reminder of her comparative unimportance in world affairs-in contrast to those more spectacular fields in which she had with emotional commitment asserted her national right. It was, however, in line with that earlier tradition that on certain matters her views should be frankly expressed. She was willing, for example, to accept an arrangement 'which requires an equitable contribution from all countries', but reacted with some sharpness against suggestions that the exporters of agricultural products should be expected to provide some of them without payment, thus in fact contributing

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<sup>1</sup> Campbell to Fraser, 12 Jun 1943.

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more than their just proportion of national income. She also made the significant-though not at this time very fruitful-suggestion that 'in view of our position as a **Pacific** power ... our maximum effort should be made in the **Pacific** area <sup>1</sup>.' She approved of the extension of relief to **India**, and made careful calculations of the extent to which she might be able to supply goods needed by **China** and Indonesia. It may be noted that in 1944 her government regarded with no enthusiasm the suggestion that relief supplies should be increased by cutting down home consumption. <sup>2</sup> In February 1945, however, she sponsored a resolution on the Far Eastern Committee of UNRRA's Council recognising that there might be need 'for supplying Governments to make available additional food and other necessaries even though such action may necessitate some sacrifice by supplying countries.' This resolution, reported the New Zealand delegate, <sup>3</sup> 'received a most enthusiastic reception ... and seemed to be one of the most popular moves brought forward.'

The New Zealand Parliament formally approved of participation in UNRRA in November 1944. All agreed that New Zealand must accept her international responsibilities for relief; Walter Nash for his government

said that 'in **Europe** chaos and anarchy are inevitable unless the **United Nations** can perform something akin to a miracle. UNRRA is the machine perfected to do that job <sup>4</sup>.' In 1945, the actual work of relief began in liberated countries, gathering momentum as victory approached; and the administration of UNRRA continued to be a proving-ground of international co-operation. In particular, a gulf opened up sadly early between **America** and the West on the one hand, and **Russia** and eastern **Europe** on the other. The precipitating problem was that of displaced persons who were estranged from the governments of their native countries, and who accordingly refused to return home. Their numbers were relatively few, but their case became crucial for both groups. New Zealand's own position was clear: 'relief should be primarily on the basis of need', <sup>5</sup> and UNRRA should not become an instrument for rewards and punishments, or for compelling refugees to submit themselves to governments which claimed their allegiance. Behind the scenes, she was of that group-together with **France** and **Australia**-which strove to avoid a direct collision on this issue between the Americans and the Russians. Her comments were, however, confined to private discussions among Commonwealth countries, and her distinct

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZ Legation, **Washington**, 10 Nov 1943.

<sup>2</sup> Departmental suggestions to this effect were not followed up by the Government.- Customs Department to **Department of External Affairs**, 14 Jul 1944.

<sup>3</sup> NZHC, **Canberra**, to Minister of External Affairs, 16 and 22 Feb 1945.

<sup>4</sup> *NZPD*, Vol. 267, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> Minute on NZ Minister, **Washington**, to Minister of External Affairs, 7 Sep 1944; Minister of External Affairs to NZ Minister, **Washington**, 13 Sep 1944.

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dissatisfaction with **Britain's** occasional disposition, just before Churchill's government was displaced by Attlee's, to be 'tough' with **Russia**, was not publicly expressed. UNRRA decisions willy-nilly had political implications-aid to **Yugoslavia**, for instance, pleased the Russians, while aid to **Italy** seemed to some Westerners to be essential to protect her from Communism and keep her out of the Russian orbit; while irritations between countries arising in other contexts inevitably led to tensions between their representatives on UNRRA bodies. New Zealand was unusually free of such extraneous influences: and she observed uneasily the rift between supplying and recipient countries, with whom **Russia** became identified. In small ways she strove for a middle position, but throughout took little public part in the sometimes acrimonious debates.

What follows is the history of UNRRA, and of the assumption of its functions by the permanent agencies of the **United Nations**: and in this transition an odd and uncharacteristic feature of New Zealand's external policy emerges. Her overseas representatives, who were mainly senior and trusted civil servants, were deeply impressed by the need for relief- indeed for emergency action to deal with 'the impending tragedy in **Europe and Asia** <sup>1</sup>.' The UNRRA Council of September 1945, wrote the New Zealand representative, met in an atmosphere of gloom, mainly because of 'accumulating evidence that, whatever we do, very many people are going to die of hunger and cold in **Europe** this winter <sup>2</sup>.' The view of those who worked with UNRRA came to be that its achievements were impressive when measured against the 'almost insuperable difficulties' with which it was at first faced. <sup>3</sup> They pressed, accordingly, for the continuance of UNRRA as an instrument not indeed perfect, but far better than anything else that could be quickly devised to take over its work. The New Zealand cabinet, on the other hand, while conscious of the need and at times acting vigorously to increase supplies, turned increasingly towards the long-term aspects of reconstruction, and therefore to the need for replacing UNRRA with permanent agencies of

the **United Nations**. It disliked piecemeal handling of the problems of devastated countries, <sup>4</sup> and thought that the Social and Economic Council should shortly take over relief 'as being one aspect of larger problems of reconstruction with which Council will be concerned <sup>5</sup>.' They were concerned about continuing expense, and recalled the original notion of UNRRA: that recipient countries should be helped to help themselves. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary NZ Legation, **Washington**, to Secretary of External Affairs, 14 May 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell to Secretary of External Affairs, 21 Sep 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Report NZ delegation, 4th session UNRRA Council.- *A to J*, 1947, Vol. I, A-2a.

<sup>4</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZHC, **London**, 22 Aug 1946.

<sup>5</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZ Legation, **Washington**, 5 Feb 1946.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Minister of External Affairs to NZHC, **London**, 3 Aug 1946.

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Such considerations apart, the plain fact was that by the middle of 1946 both **America** and **Britain** had made it clear that they were not willing to keep up the rate of contributions necessary to sustain UNRRA's activities. <sup>1</sup> Without their support, and more particularly without American resources, the smaller powers who might wish to keep the organisation going were faced with a burden which was perhaps impossible to carry, and at best could only be carried at a sacrifice that no one would face. As an embodiment of the world's drive towards social welfare, both as an end in itself and as a means towards peace, UNRRA had spent its force. The future of welfare lay with such national efforts as Marshall Aid-with unavoidable political overtones-and in the



international field, with the permanent economic agencies of the new world organisation. New Zealand's representatives were conscious that almost insoluble-and in human terms tragic-problems would be inherited by the permanent organisations charged to take over UNRRA's tasks. They did all that words could do to assure that there should be no interval when work lapsed and expressed the hope that the new organisations-especially the Economic and Social Council- might 'inherit something of the spirit of UNRRA, something of its constructiveness, of its practical outlook and its sense of urgency <sup>2</sup>.'

By 1946, of course, the **United Nations Organisation** was a going concern and represented, in as concrete form as was to be attained for many years, the peace settlement which followed the Second World War. Its ability, such as it was, to take up the economic problems under which the world was staggering was the fruit of a widely held opinion that economic problems must be seen as causes of political insecurity. New Zealand was among those communities firmly convinced of this connection, and at **San Francisco** her delegation was among those which fought successfully for the elevation of the Economic and Social Council into one of the principal organs of the **United Nations**. 'No section of the **Dumbarton Oaks** proposals underwent more extensive changes for the better than that which dealt with international co-operation in economic and social matters,' wrote Fraser. <sup>3</sup> In contrast to the experience of so many other Committees of the Conference, the Economic and Social Committee was not handicapped by the limitations and delays caused by the reluctance of the sponsoring Powers to accept, or, indeed to consider any serious departure from **Dumbarton Oaks** in so far as it affected .... fundamental provisions....'

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<sup>1</sup> SSSA to Minister of External Affairs, 20 Jul 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in report of NZ delegation to 5th Session UNRRA Council. - A to J, 1946, Vol. I, A-2a, p. 14.



Feeling favouring a 'welfare' policy in fact ran strongly at this time, and was reflected in the much-publicised argument in this committee about 'full employment'. This was something of a shibboleth for the Australian Government and, to a lesser extent, for that of New Zealand. A New Zealand amendment to include the promotion of 'full employment' among the aims of the Council alongside those of 'higher standards of living' and 'conditions of economic and social progress and development' was passed without dissent. On second thoughts the **United States** delegate asked that the matter be re-opened, as he felt that the sentence might be used as a pretext for interference in the domestic affairs of member states. He proposed that the already vague objects of the Council be further diluted to the promotion of 'Solutions of international economic, social, health, and other related problems, including those relating to the attainment of higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and racial progress and development.' Fraser and Evatt stood firm, and the **United States** eventually withdrew its amendment on the understanding that the committee agreed that nothing in this chapter of the Charter could be construed as giving authority to the organisation to intervene in the affairs of member states. The specific pledge therefore remained. 'Fifty nations,' Fraser enthusiastically told Parliament in July 1945, 'pledged themselves to carry those principles into operation.' It was 'a great advance' that the nations should agree 'not only would they give lip service to these principles, but also they would pledge themselves to carry them into active operation <sup>1</sup>.' Such an assessment of a pledge which he said in the same breath had as sanctions only 'the goodwill and the honesty of the nations' was significant both of the period and of Fraser's continuing attitudes.

The promise of full employment which thus dissolved the Prime Minister's realism was in a sense the culmination of New Zealand's deeply felt welfare tradition. Unemployment had long been the worst

nightmare of those social groups who dominated the New Zealand way of thought. Their fears had been underlined by the grievous and, to the 'common man', irrational sufferings of the depression time. Gradual recovery from the slump had coincided in New Zealand-as in **Australia** and the **United States**-with an expansionist government; and relatively good times were soon followed by the plunge into war. In spite of apprehensions, the war years were for civilians years of plentiful work and good pay. Young New Zealand grew accustomed to 'full employment', admittedly

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<sup>1</sup> NZPD, Vol. 268, quoted Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1952*, Vol. II, p. 1097.

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under the somewhat artificial conditions of war and recovery. This experience gave little guidance as to how 'full employment' would operate in peacetime, either as a psychological or as an economic factor in a community's life. Facing the future, however, the statesmen of welfare had no doubt as to what they should proclaim at **San Francisco** as mankind's economic objective. 'Full employment' was prescribed with emotion by men who had lived through insecurity and economic depression, for generations who had been bred in social security and wartime labour shortage, and who paradoxically had grown so accustomed to military danger that even the atom bomb and its dreadful successors could be accepted with apathy. The social remedies so passionately desired-and resisted-in the first half of the century were in considerable measure achieved by 1945 and written into public documents. Those which were not positively achieved were recognised, in the most solemn way, as objects of immediate public policy. These very successes meant, however, that the next steps were taken into the unknown.

What followed, and the manner in which the **United Nations** in their disarray carried the burdens thrust upon them in 1945, is no part of the history of New Zealand at war.



# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## CHAPTER 25 – EAST AND WEST

## CHAPTER 25

### *East and West*

FROM 25 April to 25 June 1945 an oft-repeated drama was re-enacted on the ample stage of **San Francisco**. The setting was more spacious, if less elegant, than it had been at Vienna and **Versailles**. Two hundred and eighty-two delegates laboured with the help of 2500 experts while 2636 journalists proclaimed the results to the world. <sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the basic pattern remained that of 1815 and 1919. Men whose minds were imprisoned in the past conceived themselves to be preoccupied with the future. In the effort to transform a temporary wartime co-operation into a permanent basis for peace, the shape of what was to come was only dimly perceived, and men's hopes only gradually adjusted themselves to disagreeable realities. Problems and solutions alike were expressed in formulae which less and less conformed with reality. Out of the **San Francisco** Conference emerged something which all delegates declared should be at all costs avoided, the possibility of a third world war and the actuality of a vociferously proclaimed 'cold war' splitting the world, with localised, undeclared 'hot wars' as fierce as those that had devastated **Spain** and **Abyssinia**. The most important event during the conference, in fact, was the meeting of Russian and American troops on the Elbe on the day of the formal opening in **San Francisco**. With the collapse of **Germany** active co-operation was no longer compulsory, and from that fact strife flowed irresistibly.

On relationships between **Russia** and the West—the central problem behind the debates at **San Francisco** on the construction of a world organisation—New Zealand had an attitude with a history and consistency established over several years. Issues comparable with those of 1945 had, in fact, arisen in the first phase of the war and had similarly brought into conflict the Dominion's persistent desire on the one hand for good relations between **Russia** and the West and, on the other, for the condemnation of aggression from whatever direction it might arise. This twofold attitude had from time to time brought clear divergence between British and New Zealand policies. On certain issues

<sup>1</sup> McNeill, p. 592.

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expressed views coincided with those of the **USSR**: a circumstance remembered in January 1945 in the External Affairs Department as being of possible diplomatic significance. It was then felt that the Soviet Government might even be so mistaken as to have read into the support it had sometimes received at Geneva a general commitment to follow the Russian line, and accordingly a disposition to accept Russian policy in the issues then arising in **Poland**. New Zealand's position was, however, clear enough. Her policy at Geneva was determined by her view of the issues concerned, not by any particular wish to support or to oppose the Russians. Admittedly her general view of the Soviet Union, though not exactly sympathetic, lacked the axiomatic hostility of western conservatism. It was influenced to some extent by an appreciation of the importance in the community of those elements inclined to give the Russians the benefit of the doubt, and had consistently stressed a realistic desire to have Russian co-operation in a struggle that was becoming global. Moreover, New Zealand was clearly conscious that **Russia** was a **Pacific** power and, so long as not in the enemy camp, a counterweight to **Japan**. <sup>1</sup>

New Zealand's attitude in these matters was expounded firmly in the early months of 1940. Awkward practical problems had been raised on the one hand by the Russian attack on **Finland**, and on the other by Allied efforts to deny to **Germany** supplies of strategic raw materials. Arguments for helping the Finns to resist aggression had a strong appeal, and were actively canvassed in **Britain** and **France**. The case was the more attractive to Allied governments because military operations in Scandinavia seemed to offer hope of cutting **Germany's** access to Swedish iron ore. <sup>2</sup> To give effective help to **Finland**, however, was to run the risk of war with **Russia**, and would probably involve violation of Norwegian and Swedish neutrality. In this situation the **New Zealand**

**Government** reacted strongly. Fraser agreed that everything possible should be done to help the Finns, but urged ‘most strongly that every effort should be made to avoid open hostilities with **Russia** as it would be difficult to foresee the results of such hostilities.’ A policy which conceivably might lead to war with the Soviet Union, he explained, might well lead to opposition from Labour's left wing strong enough seriously to impede New Zealand's war effort unless every exertion had evidently been made to bring the Russians and Finns to terms.<sup>3</sup> He feared the same kind of local reaction, and expressed himself in even stronger terms, when it was suggested that in the

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<sup>1</sup> PM's notes for secret session, September 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Derry, *Campaign in Norway*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> UKHC to SSSA, 6 Feb 1940.

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interests of the Finns the neutrality of **Norway** and **Sweden** might be forcibly violated.<sup>1</sup>

This particular group of problems disappeared with the ending of the Soviet-Finnish war on 13 March 1940, but others remained. Hopes that **Hitler** might be running short of oil, for instance, led the Allies to attach great importance to the supplies which might be provided from **Russia**. The possibilities of cutting off this source of supply by bombarding the Caucasian oilfields were accordingly studied by British and French experts, and at the end of March the French proposed immediate action.<sup>2</sup> Such suggestions fortunately never got beyond the stage of study and discussion; but they indicated possibilities alarming to the **New Zealand Government**. Fraser made it clear that New Zealand would be opposed to action against **Russia** except in response to Russian aggression against **Britain** or one of her close allies. Anything that might appear as British aggression against **Russia**, he thought, would be undesirable in itself, and in addition likely to rouse uncomfortably strong opposition within



New Zealand's objections in February, March and April 1940 to policies which might lead to war with **Russia** were always fortified with clear practical arguments. Nevertheless, these discussions show a persistent trend in Fraser's thinking, a trend which was illustrated again at the time of the German attack on **Russia** in June 1941. He was in England and with Churchill when the latter made his historic broadcast decision to help the Russians. Fraser at once asked New Zealand to associate herself with Churchill's statement; and this was done, within a few hours, on 23 June. <sup>4</sup> A fortnight later he asked New Zealand to approve the British War Cabinet's draft declaration of Anglo-Russian mutual assistance. This too was done, though the New Zealand cabinet raised questions about the status of **Finland**, about Russian attitudes towards a Japanese drive southward, and about the possible implications of a Japanese attack on **Russia**. Fraser brushed such questions aside. In his view the only question now was the prosecution of the war against **Germany**. He took much the same attitude a few months later when a member of the Wellington Trades Council questioned him about trade with **Russia**: 'The position is that if **Russia** wants anything we can supply, she can have it. We are part of a common war front against **Hitler** <sup>5</sup>.' It was shown again at a surprisingly late date by an outburst by Fraser against some speculations by Smuts, at the Prime Ministers'

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<sup>1</sup> UKHC to SSDA, 3 Mar 1940.

<sup>2</sup> SSDA to UKHC, 30 Mar 1940.

<sup>3</sup> UKHC to SSDA, 31 Mar 1940 and 23 Apr 1940.

<sup>4</sup> SSDA to PM, 23 Jun 1941; *Evening Post*, 23 and 26 Jun 1941.

<sup>5</sup> *Standard*, 2 Oct 1941.

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Conference of April 1945, on ideological aggression. <sup>1</sup> Fraser 'thought it a mistake to envisage a division in the future between Communist and non-Communist nations, since an ideological split of this kind would be part of the internal problem of each country. If there were in fact such a war, the working classes of all capitalist countries would, in his opinion, rally to the support of **Russia**.' This declaration echoed not only memories of the early nineteen-twenties but a constant trend in Labour thought which was no doubt reinforced by current popular enthusiasm for the Russians: 'Among working classes here,' cabled Jordan from **London** in March, 'enthusiasm for **Russia** and popularity of Stalin unabated <sup>2</sup>.'

Desire for good relations with **Russia** did not muffle the **New Zealand Government's** impartial disapproval of aggression. In December 1939, following the attack on **Finland**, New Zealand voted for the expulsion of **Russia** from the League. In 1940 she was clearly uneasy at a suggested British approach to **Russia** which involved an offer to extend 'de facto recognition to the results of Russian aggression against the Baltic States, **Poland** and Roumania <sup>3</sup>.' Similar misgivings were expressed again in April 1942. In response to Russian pressure, the British Government was then contemplating a treaty of alliance which would in effect have recognised **Russia's** 1940 frontiers save only those with **Poland**; and it asked whether the Dominions would endorse a treaty, make a similar one or remain silent. The New Zealand reply acknowledged that there were 'urgent and strong reasons why we would meet Russian desires whenever and wherever they can be met', but said that the proposed agreement, so far as it concerned the Baltic states, seemed to be 'so incompatible with the undertakings of the Atlantic Charter and so foreign to the basic principles of right and justice upon which the war is being fought that they cannot believe that it is wise or proper.' It would, so the **New Zealand Government** feared, be repugnant to 'the conscience of the world' as being 'a grave injustice to the people of the Baltic States ... and a substantial departure from the moral basis upon which we embarked on this struggle.' They expressed no criticism

of the United Kingdom Government's action, which 'they might themselves have found it necessary to take were they under the same necessity as are His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** directly to answer the Russian request.' Nevertheless, they said plainly that for their part they 'would not wish to be a party to the agreement and would therefore much prefer that the Treaty be silent as to Dominion participation.' The message

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> NZHC, **London**, to Minister of External Affairs, 8 Mar 1945.

<sup>3</sup> The quotation is from a draft telegram prepared in the Prime Minister's Department in October 1940. It was not sent.

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concluded with a suggestion that, if it were not too late, a meeting between Churchill and Stalin might be warranted. <sup>1</sup>

New Zealand's attitudes towards **Russia** and **Poland** were made clear in the early years of the war. As regards the Poles, added warmth of interest came both from the energetic work of a capable Polish Consul-General in **Wellington** and from the presence of a substantial group of refugees—748 children together with 88 adults—who came via Iran in 1944. It was perhaps not surprising, therefore, to find some signs of uneasiness at the Russian failure to assist the Polish rising in **Warsaw** in August 1944, but the problem arose in a new and intractable form in the following January.

In that month the Russians recognised as the Government of **Poland** the 'Polish National Committee' which they had established in Lublin. This immediately raised the problem as to whether New Zealand should or should not in this context show the same concern for moral principle as in the past by continuing to recognise the government-in-exile. She reacted with some sharpness to the attempted compromise which

emerged from discussions between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at **Yalta** shortly afterwards. The **Yalta** proposals for **Poland** were based on the Lublin Committee, which had now become the **Warsaw** government. That government, it was agreed, should be 'reorganised on a broader democratic basis', with the help of a joint Russo-British-American Commission, and with the addition of some democratic Polish leaders drawn both from **Poland** itself and from Poles then in exile. The resulting provisional government would be pledged to hold as soon as possible free elections in which 'all democratic and Anti-Nazi parties' were to participate, and would be recognised by **Russia**, **Britain** and the **United States**.<sup>2</sup> The Big Three added that the Poles' new eastern frontier should roughly follow the 'Curzon Line', that they should gain considerable territory to the north and the west, and that the finalisation of their western frontier should await the Peace Conference.

New Zealand's vigorous criticism of these arrangements showed, in general, a continuing anxiety lest morality in international affairs should be sacrificed to expediency and, in particular, a firm grasp over the essential elements in a complex and remote problem. The establishment of an effective **Department of External Affairs** had borne fruit in a manifestly increased capacity for relevant and informed comment on world issues. Fraser and his colleagues plainly disliked the proposal to build a new government on the Lublin Committee. From the available evidence, wrote Fraser, it would

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<sup>1</sup> PM to SSSA, 28 Apr 1942.

<sup>2</sup> McNeill, p. 558, quoting Stettinius, pp. 309–10.

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appear that that committee 'does not in any real sense represent the Polish people and has in fact been imposed upon them. It seems very doubtful whether any governmental body of which that committee remains the effective nucleus will prove capable of winning the democratic allegiance of the Polish nation.' He asked whether light

could be thrown on the conference's failure to adopt Churchill's proposal to construct an entirely new government, and went on to discuss, with a pessimism that was to be amply justified, the task facing the Commission of three. 'The best that can be said of the arrangement is that it is better than empowering the Lublin Committee to reorganise itself as a Provisional Government. It is however doubtful whether the Commission can hope to obtain effective guarantees for a free election which will truly reflect in accordance with the intentions of the Atlantic Charter the democratic wishes of the Polish people including those serving in the Polish services abroad. As the matter stands I realise that the choice is between this degree of international supervision of the Polish settlement and the complete abstention of the Western Powers. Despite those apprehensions however I trust that no degree of effort will be spared to ensure the establishment of a provisional government of genuinely independent character and that the Western Powers will withhold recognition of the new provisional government until they are satisfied that such is the case. No preparation for the **San Francisco** discussions seems more important than a solution of the Polish problem on which our minds can rest with some degree of comfort.'

Fraser went on to comment on the frontier arrangements, again in surprising detail. 'From the very imperfect knowledge I have of this complicated question,' he wrote, 'it does appear that **Poland** has a just claim for Lwow with or without the neighbouring oilfields and we should continue to give our support to such adjustments in Polish favour.' He was more concerned, however, regarding the western frontier where, he argued at some length, the case that 'just as... the British endeavoured to persuade the Poles from accepting the liability of vast areas east of the Curzon line after the last war, so we should endeavour to impress upon them the dangers of making a similar mistake in the west on this occasion.' Here he felt the alternatives were the transfer of population on an impossibly large scale or the creation of a vast minority problem which would 'embroil **Poland** so deeply with **Germany** as to compel her to depend permanently on the Soviet Union for her security. While I believe that a settlement which requires **Poland** to maintain good relations with

**Russia** is essential, one that makes her future security almost exclusively dependent upon Russian support is clearly unwise.’ Fraser concluded by remarking on the increasing tendency of the major powers to settle problems piecemeal instead of bringing them to a Peace Conference, ‘which alone will be in a position to examine these problems in all their bearings and effect satisfactory settlements <sup>1</sup>.’

Churchill replied with customary vigour. He recognised the force of many of Fraser's criticisms, which ‘are indeed inescapable and have throughout been very much in our minds.’ Nevertheless, he went on, ‘Great Britain and the British Commonwealth are very much weaker militarily than Soviet Russia and have no means short of another general war of enforcing their point of view. Nor can we ignore the position of the **United States**. We cannot go further in helping **Poland** than the **United States** is willing or can be persuaded to go. We have therefore to do the best we can.’ He discussed the problem of **Poland's** western boundaries, offered some defence of the three-power international commission, and then assured Fraser in conclusion that ‘We are only committed on the basis of full execution in good faith of the terms of our published communique. Personally in spite of my anti-communist convictions I have good hopes that **Russia** or at any rate Stalin desires to work in harmony with the western democracies. The alternative would be despair about the future of the world. We shall not flinch however from our duty as we conceive it to the last scrap of our life and strength.’

Thereafter the matter dragged. It seems that Fraser was still dissatisfied with the **Yalta** formula, and said so at the Commonwealth Conference held at **London** in April before the meeting at **San Francisco**. He also, it would seem, was in touch with the leaders of the Polish government-in-exile and helped to persuade them that they ‘should make a constructive effort and play their part in reaching a settlement instead of maintaining the completely negative attitude adopted since **Crimea** <sup>2</sup>.’ It was, however, only after five months of negotiations, which incidentally left little doubt as to Russian intentions in **Poland**, that a

positive move was made. In June, after considerable unsuccessful pressure by **Britain** on the government-in-exile, and hard negotiating by **Harry Hopkins** with Stalin, a group of Polish exiles was invited to **Moscow**. It was then agreed that the **Warsaw** government should be enlarged by the inclusion of Mikolajczyk—a former prime minister in the government-in-exile—and a few other Poles from abroad. <sup>3</sup> The new government was recognised on 5 July by the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**.

The New Zealand Government reserved its decision ‘for further consideration in the light of all the facts’; <sup>4</sup> but it could only be a

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<sup>1</sup> Minister of External Affairs to SSDA, 20 Feb 1945.

<sup>2</sup> SSDA to Minister of External Affairs, 25 Apr 1945.

<sup>3</sup> McNeill, pp. 586 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Minister of External Affairs to NZ Minister, **Washington**, 6 Jul 1945.

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matter of delay. As one of Fraser's advisers cogently remarked, ‘We made no public protest at the time of the **Yalta** decisions and by our silence then seem precluded from denying recognition to a Government established according to the formula laid down by the Crimea Conference.’ No immediate action followed, though in August the New Zealand Minister in **Moscow** reported that ‘**Australia** and New Zealand are practically the only nations represented here which have not formally recognised the present Government’ of **Poland**. New Zealand certainly continued to be interested in Polish affairs, but did not until December 1945 fall into line by withdrawing recognition from the Polish government-in-exile. <sup>1</sup>

The Polish problem reached a climax during the **San Francisco**



Conference, and was at once an education for New Zealand in the diplomacy of the newly emerging world, and a demonstration of the limited importance of a small power's policy. Nevertheless, for what it was worth, New Zealand sustained her own consistently held viewpoint in face of a complex problem. Her attitudes were also tested in a brief but tense episode which, at much the same time, illustrated the problems of East-West relationships in another frontier area.

By an odd chance New Zealand was intimately involved in one of the first major incidents which illustrated the dangers of the new power-situation. The decision to leave the Division in **Europe** till the end of the Italian campaign kept it in the firing line until the Germans surrendered on 2 May 1945. At much the same time the forces of Marshal Tito closed in on **Trieste**. It was therefore New Zealand troops who happened to share the occupation of a long-disputed territory. Moreover, as Tito frankly explained, his operations had more than a purely military purpose. He was, he said, Prime Minister as well as Commander-in-Chief, and the territories in question had been unjustly annexed by **Italy** under a former treaty. He intended to rectify the matter in the confusion of a dying war, which meant absorbing into an actively communist **Yugoslavia** areas in which the towns had a heavily Italian population. New Zealanders were established in the midst of a political crisis of complex causes and character, and with highly explosive possibilities. It was, indeed, the kind of situation which New Zealand had always been anxious to avoid; and her reluctance to permit New Zealand forces to be used for garrison duties after the Armistice had been expressed as recently as August and September 1944, with particular reference to a proposal by General Wilson to include 'for

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<sup>1</sup> Though recognition was not thereby extended to the **Warsaw** government. It was not until April 1947 that the Minister of External Affairs advised the New Zealand Minister in **Moscow** that 'While we do not propose by any specific formal act to recognise the Polish Government we shall in future act as if we have extended such recognition.'

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association's sake', a small New Zealand detachment in the force to be sent to **Greece** on the German evacuation. In this decision was evident an unwillingness to take sides in Greek politics as well as a desire to get the NZEF home as soon as fighting had ceased. <sup>1</sup>

Faced by Tito's drastic assertion of his rights, Truman reacted sharply, with Churchill's warm approval. President and Prime Minister agreed that Tito was taking the law into his own hands in a manner 'all too reminiscent' of **Hitler** and **Japan**, and thereby challenging 'the fundamental principles of territorial settlement by orderly process against force, intimidation, or blackmail <sup>2</sup>.' The tactic adopted was not, they thought, different in principle when adopted by an ally and by an enemy. They would have been less than human if they had not found Tito all the less likeable because of his regime's frankly communist character and because of the methods and success with which he had risen to supreme power in his own country. Nevertheless, the issue as they saw it was one of principle with long-term implications. It was at the same time an urgent practical instance of a problem which had to be faced in the interests of post-war stability, namely, the westward thrust of communist power and the necessity somewhere to draw a firm boundary to its further expansion. In particular, Tito was feared to have designs in southern **Austria**. Churchill was particularly pleased that the new President should grasp so firmly 'the moral essentials of the cause for which we have fought' and be willing 'to take firm and bold action without fear of being accused of entanglements in **Europe**.' A firm stand in **Trieste**, he added, might 'lead to a showdown with **Russia** on questions like the independence and sovereignty of **Poland**, **Austria**, **Czechoslovakia**, and **Yugoslavia**.... I feel we are safe as well as right in closing ranks with the **United States** upon this matter <sup>3</sup>.' It seemed, in fact, that Tito's intransigence might be a powerful factor in promoting a development which Churchill ardently desired but dared not count upon: active American participation in post-war **Europe** in counterpoise to the Russians.

An appeal to moral principle never failed to move Peter Fraser. He

was at this time in **San Francisco**, deeply involved in the basic planning of UNO, and disturbed also by the crucial problem of New Zealand's participation in the **Pacific** war: a problem in which party, national and world strategy were awkwardly interlocked, and on which a decision was urgently necessary. He responded at once hotly, indeed vehemently, to Churchill's appeal. To condone such unilateral action, he wrote to **Freyberg** and to Nash, who was

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 354–5, 398–400.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill to Fraser, 13 May 1945

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acting Prime Minister, would nullify 'everything for which we have fought and are still fighting', and tend to promote similar 'situations which can be met only by further disastrous concessions on our part or with another war <sup>1</sup>.' Aggression must therefore be halted at the earliest possible moment, if necessary by force, and if necessary, since they were on the spot, by New Zealanders. He told Churchill that action should only be taken if it had been 'demonstrated clearly and beyond dispute to the world' that only 'the obstinate and definitely aggressive attitude of **Yugoslavia**' had frustrated earnest efforts to reach a solution in strict accordance with the principles for which the **United Nations** stood, and even then only with a firm assurance that there would be no interference in **Yugoslavia**'s affairs. Subject to such assurances, he thought that the **New Zealand Government** should allow its Division to be used, if the need arose. <sup>2</sup>

**Freyberg** in **Trieste** reached the same conclusion. He was on good personal terms with the Yugoslav commanders, but saw the possibility of serious trouble ahead. 'I do not see how you can do otherwise than authorise the use of the Division,' he wrote to Fraser, <sup>3</sup> 'nor would any of the force wish you to do otherwise.' He went on to explain how the

course of military operations had carried the Division into a situation where its every action—or abstinence from action—was charged with grave political importance. In **Trieste**, he wrote,<sup>4</sup> the New Zealanders were inevitably offending both sides. Tito's men disliked having outsiders established in what they claimed as their territory and necessarily observing, even if not checking, the actions of the new regime. Italians and conservatives generally resented the Division 'standing by while ... a revolution to bring the country under a Communist Yugoslavia is carried out around us.' **Freyberg's** view was, he wrote, that vigorous political—rather than military—action was needed. He agreed in general with Fraser's opinions, but added soberly: 'I am only a little uncertain when it comes to the application of any ideal or principle in **Balkan** countries, where terrible things have happened and are still happening.' A firm stand might produce the desired results; but those who took it must be prepared to fight.

It was a grim situation. By any military reckoning, the Division was due to be withdrawn from the fighting. Yet it stood on the very edge of conflict with erstwhile allies on an issue in which the great powers had taken sides; confronting Tito was an Anglo-American army, and behind him were the Russians. On 16 and 17 May an anxious New Zealand cabinet weighed the problem. It

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 418, 16 May 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser to Nash, 14 May 1945.— *Documents*, II, pp. 415–16.

<sup>3</sup> *Documents*, II, p. 418.

<sup>4</sup> **Freyberg** to Fraser and Nash, 16 May 1945.— *Documents*, II, pp. 419–21.

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had before it the strongly expressed views of Truman, Churchill and Fraser on this particular issue, and also the formidable volume of

information on the general situation supplied according to routine by the British Government. Among those present there was a natural reluctance to become entangled in further fighting, and some ministers felt that Truman and Churchill had gone too far and had made inadequate allowances for the pent-up feelings of peoples who had long suffered Fascist and Nazi oppression. A violent reaction was only too likely. Would it not be better met, it was argued, by quietly playing for time till passion had abated and reason could be heard, than by the threat of immediate force? New Zealanders remembered, too, as did Churchill, that behind **Yugoslavia** was **Russia**, but from this circumstance they drew a different conclusion. Perhaps they rated higher than he did the possibility that the Russians would underwrite Tito's position. The possibility, even as some saw it the probability, that the proposed action might lead to war with **Russia** was clearly repugnant to cabinet. Its reaction was reminiscent of that in 1940 when it had been suggested that the Allies should fight **Russia** on behalf of the Finns. Moreover, it was reflected, a major military crisis in **Europe** meant delay in the defeat of **Japan**.

Viewed from **Wellington**, in short, the issue lacked the clear-cut certainties of Fraser's assessment. Three or four men, including the acting Prime Minister, agreed that the actions proposed by Fraser should be taken, 'after every road of compromise has been fully explored.' At the other extreme, some thought that the Division should be promptly withdrawn from the area of crisis and New Zealand thus relieved of responsibility. Others pointed out the difficulties of withdrawal, and suggested possible ways of compromise between Tito and the West. The debate was warm but in good temper, and was summarised for Fraser with the conclusion that 'there is a very strong feeling that we ought not to commit our Division to further fighting unless attacked, and that we should take every step to avoid the possibility of attack.' Without expressly denying the use of the Division, it was a cable which showed Fraser that the majority of his colleagues and lifelong friends in the Labour movement were uneasy on the issue. They evidently did not think that his prior condition had been fulfilled—it had not been

demonstrated to the world clearly and beyond dispute that the only obstacle to just settlement was 'the obstinate and definitely aggressive attitude of **Yugoslavia** ...'—and they recoiled from the thought that the Division should be too hurriedly pledged to action against gallant allies who had fought so bravely under cruel difficulties.

Nash's report was received by Fraser with stunned silence followed by three long, closely typed pages of vehement disagreement. The moral issues still seemed to him crystal clear and of great practical importance. 'It is more important that the methods adopted and practised by the Yugoslav government should be stopped finally and completely than it is for the **San Francisco** Conference to prove a complete constructive success, which thanks to the decisions of the three great powers now appears impossible of attainment.' To withdraw the Division at the height of the crisis would be interpreted as a blow struck at the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** at the very moment when they 'were firmly upholding the principles for which the war was fought.' He admitted the possibility that a policy of firm resistance to Tito might be 'misunderstood and misconstrued by large sections of the community'—there was a vocal pro-Tito section among New Zealand Yugoslavs—but, he added, 'in a crisis public opinion must not be feared, it must be met.'

There was, then, disagreement between Fraser in **San Francisco** and cabinet in New Zealand on the right reading of the **Trieste** crisis. All agreed in principle that the fate of the territories in question should be decided as part of a general settlement and not by unilateral action. There were differences of judgment, however, on the moral justification for Tito's haste and on the possibilities of a compromise decision. There were evidently differences of opinion also on the underlying problem of relations between the West and **Russia**. The problem so vividly seen by Churchill, that of the establishment of Russian power and Russian satellites in the heart of **Europe** was, it seems, only dimly perceived by some New Zealanders. There was perhaps lack of conviction on the need to draw a firm line on which the West could stand and a plain lack of

eagerness that New Zealand should assume practical responsibilities in guaranteeing this part of the post-war security system.

The debate, if forced to a decision, would have thrown light on the workings of the Labour Party, on the extent of Fraser's personal dominance, and on New Zealand political attitudes. Before a formal answer was sent to Churchill, however, Tito made an offer which, in cabinet's view, opened the way to peaceful settlement. Answering in these terms on 23 May, the **New Zealand Government** could avoid the whole question of the use of the Division. On the same day, 23 May, **Freyberg** reported from **Trieste** that tension which had looked dangerous had greatly relaxed, and that he could look forward to the Division's release from its operational role. <sup>1</sup> Discussion continued on details, and so far as New Zealand was concerned Fraser consoled himself that cabinet, in its cable to Churchill, did

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<sup>1</sup> Nash to Churchill and **Freyberg** to Nash, 23 May 1945.—  
*Documents*, II, pp. 423–4.

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not expressly object to the use of the Division if it had been required. <sup>1</sup> Moreover, it remained in the danger area, not without minor difficulties, till the end of July. <sup>2</sup> But **Trieste** soon ceased to torment the New Zealand cabinet, and the solution of outstanding problems between **Italy** and **Yugoslavia** became a matter of world politics.

It may be said that New Zealand's brief involvement with the Yugoslavs had a happy ending. The New Zealand Division was, at leisure and legitimately, withdrawn from the danger area; and a few months afterwards, at the first meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, Fraser by a graceful withdrawal assured to **Yugoslavia** a seat on the Social and Economic Council. 'We have endeavoured to understand the position of **Yugoslavia**,' he said, 'and we have nothing but friendship for that country'; moreover, the public interest demanded a quick ending to the deadlock. <sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the tense incident of **Trieste** demonstrated, in fact, a most unhappy conclusion. The world had passed from one war

to the next without interval: even if the character of the warfare had changed. There is no moment of which it can confidently be said, here the war ended, and the belligerents (New Zealand among them) laid down the tasks of war and took up those of peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser to Jordan, 25 May 1945. His interpretation of the text seems strained.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents*, II, pp. 424–7.

<sup>3</sup> Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 237.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



## CHAPTER 26 – SMALL POWER RAMPANT

## CHAPTER 26

### *Small Power Rampant*

**DETERIORATING** relationships between **Russia** and the West can now be seen as the clue to much that happened at **San Francisco**; yet it would be anachronistic to over-emphasise the part played by this development in the minds of most of the participants. Idealism as well as consciousness of tension was brought to **San Francisco** and, paradoxically, the Allies of the Second World War had their peace conference before the fighting was over and when they thought they were doing something else. The conference excluded, of course, direct representation of the enemy—as the 1919 conference had done—but apart from that factor, it was to an unparalleled degree representative of the world. It provided a means by which the realities of power could be revealed and could be shaken down into a pattern. This process, though at times grievously disappointing, was not without elements of hope.

In the forging of a policy by the representatives of fifty nations great and small, New Zealand could, relatively speaking, play only a small part even when, as was often the case, she was associated with **Australia**. Nevertheless, the **San Francisco** Conference represented in many ways the climax of New Zealand's international activities and of the evolution in her basic attitudes traced in the present volume. The New Zealand delegation as much as any, and perhaps more consciously than most, was guided by its past thinking. In her case, however, this did not amount to a wish to return to a past state of affairs, real or imaginary. It meant, rather, the reaffirmation of principles which had been quite deliberately, and against the known wishes of the British Government, formulated in 1936. These views were radical then, in the sense that they required a bold reconstruction of the foundations underlying the world's security organisation, and they were correspondingly disliked by respectable and conservative powers who were committed to the existing system. They were radical still in April 1945 when Peter Fraser, having seen in the experiences of the intervening years no cause to modify them, carried them to **San Francisco** as the basis of his country's

programme for the post-war world. <sup>1</sup> By this time,

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<sup>1</sup> *Department of External Affairs, United Nations Conference on International Organisation, Publication No. 11.*

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however, New Zealand's international status and her habit of independent action in international affairs had grown vastly stronger. Her Prime Minister had established with the leaders of the **United Nations** strong links based on shared experiences and mutual respect. Further, the New Zealand Labour Government had built with the like-minded government in **Australia** a firm community of purpose and a basic identity of policy. Fraser's ultimate decision to be present personally both at the **San Francisco** Conference and at the preceding Commonwealth discussions in **London** was in part due to the earnest request of Herbert Evatt, **Australia's** Minister for External Affairs. Throughout these negotiations, accordingly, the similarity in viewpoint between the two dominions, and the ability of their spokesmen, formed a factor of some importance in international politics. The result was not to make the Big Three change major decisions to which they were thoroughly committed. In one sense, accordingly, the persistent fight of Fraser and Evatt and other small-power spokesmen had relatively unimpressive concrete results. Yet something was achieved, and issues were thoroughly canvassed. Moreover, the value of a fight put up in a political institution by a determined and well-equipped minority cannot be measured by immediate results.

Quite consistently, throughout Labour's period of power in New Zealand, Fraser and his principal advisers thought in terms of a supra-national organisation which would exercise judicial powers and command physical force and, moreover, could mobilise the loyalty of men and women all over the world. They fought for this conception both in Commonwealth consultations and, in due course, in the wider forum of the **United Nations**. At first, at least, the leaders of the great powers had quite different thoughts in mind about the organisation of the post-

war world. Churchill seems to have been the first to have given definite form to his ideas, and he inclined strongly towards a system of regional councils. 'It was only the countries whose interests were directly affected by a dispute who could be expected to apply themselves with sufficient vigour to secure a settlement,' he wrote. 'If countries remote from a dispute were among those called upon in the first instance to achieve a settlement the result was likely to be merely vapid and academic discussion <sup>1</sup>.' Roosevelt in early 1943 inclined to agree with Churchill, and seems to have thought, indeed, that there might be no need for any world-wide security organisation at all. His view seems to have been rather that the future problems of mankind could best be handled by direct contact between Churchill, Stalin, **Chiang Kai-shek** and himself. <sup>2</sup> Within the American Government, however, Cordell

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, *Second World War*, Vol. IV, p. 719.

<sup>2</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, pp. 1642-3. Cf. *Hopkins Papers*, Vol. II, p. 742.

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Hull and his subordinates in the State Department fought hard for an organisation more or less along the lines of the **League of Nations**. Hull feared that, in practice, regional organisations would become spheres of influence for the various great powers. They would thus breed wars in traditional fashion and might even become strong enough to discriminate against American trade. Further, he believed that American public opinion would not support participation in a European or an Asiatic regional organisation, though it might accept something more universal. By August 1943 Hull's arguments had convinced Roosevelt. The President now favoured a single worldwide organisation, but his conception differed greatly from that of Fraser and other idealists among small nations. He thought of it as dominated by the Big Four, **America, Britain, Russia** and (despite her existing weaknesses) **China**. Churchill, it seems, readily followed Roosevelt's repudiation of regionalism, for he regarded this as the best means of securing American

collaboration in the organisation of the post-war world. Accordingly, the first **Quebec** Conference of August 1943 endorsed **Cordell Hull**'s proposal that an effective world-wide international organisation should be set up at the earliest practicable time. <sup>1</sup>

The principle thus agreed upon was duly proposed to the Russians at the **Moscow** Conference of October, and for the first time the four great powers declared very firmly their intention to co-operate not only for victory in war, but in the building of the post-war world. As Hull triumphantly told Congress, 'the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the **United States** and **China** have laid the foundation for cooperative effort in the post-war world toward enabling all peace-loving nations, large and small, to live in peace and security, to preserve the liberties and rights of civilised existence and to enjoy expanded opportunities and facilities for economic, social and spiritual progress <sup>2</sup>.' It remained to embody optimistic general principles in a workable constitution, and this task was entrusted to representatives of the four great powers in the discussions held at **Dumbarton Oaks** during August, September and October 1944. By this time a fairly early end to the war was a practical possibility, and accordingly there was some urgency about planning. Before the conference met, each of the four governments had prepared its own proposals; that of the **United Kingdom** being drafted in the light of discussions previously held among Commonwealth countries. The four sets of proposals were interchanged among the governments concerned so that when the conference began all the negotiators knew what the others had in mind. In these circumstances,

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<sup>1</sup> Hull, *Memoirs*, Vol. II, p. 1646; McNeill, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted McNeill, p. 335. The declaration is summarised on p. 331.

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up to a point was readily reached. It was accepted, for example, that the organisation was to be named The United Nations and was to have as its two principal organs a General Assembly, on which all members were represented, and a Security Council. The Council, it was agreed, should consist of five permanent members—the **United States**, the **United Kingdom**, **Russia**, **China** and **France**—together with six other states elected by the Assembly for two-yearly terms.

Thus far was common ground, but decisions had to follow which would define the new organisation's essential character. One tendency, maybe even a final decision, was indeed embodied in the mechanics of these very preliminary discussions. Despite the vehement demands of **Australia** and New Zealand for a wider basis of discussion, the future world was being planned by the representatives of the Big Three, with **China** as a somewhat problematical fourth partner; and the draft proposals before them were frankly based on the presumption of their own permanent predominance. It is true that of the spokesmen present the British delegates knew dominion opinion very well and were understood to be keeping it in mind. <sup>1</sup> It is true, too, that throughout the discussions there were regular consultations between the dominion representatives in **Washington** and the British delegation to **Dumbarton Oaks**. Yet wise representatives of small powers knew very well that the leaders of their great allies were not seriously concerned about their opinions, and that if a world organisation was set up New Zealand could not stand aside, however grave she judged its defects to be. Even with respect to her well-tried friends in **Britain**, Fraser knew well that in many cases they had to act without consulting dominion opinion, or even at times against the known wishes of their overseas associates. 'While the representatives of the **United Kingdom** honestly give adherence to the whole conception of the Dominions having a full voice in world affairs,' he said, 'yet almost automatically they act in an emergency as if that adherence was overlooked for the time being.' Such action he acknowledged to be at times unavoidable. But, he added, 'when it comes to a series of events that means practically exclusion, the time is ripe for the next consideration.'

The Dominions, then, were under no illusions as to the weight likely to be accorded to their views by the principal negotiators at **Dumbarton Oaks**. Further, though they formally and forcefully reserved the right to express their views on the proposals when these at last emerged, their representatives knew how hard it would be to bring about any change in the policy of the great powers when that had once been formulated. This was, in part, inherent in the

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<sup>1</sup> SSDA to NZ Minister of External Affairs. 23 Aug 1944.

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plain fact of great-power leadership. It was intensified, however, by the way in which the **Dumbarton Oaks** conference was organised. In theory the proposals were to remain confidential until discussed by the governments whom they concerned. The United States Government, however, had two distinct and legitimate purposes. The one was to reach a set of proposals that would provide wisely for the post-war world. The other was so to educate American public opinion that, when the time came, the **United States** should take that keen and active interest in the new organisation which all agreed was indispensable to its success. One of the instruments in this process of education was the discussion of the issues that arose, and of the policy to be adopted toward them, with congressmen of both parties. The result was that discussions at **Dumbarton Oaks** were conducted in a blaze of publicity which obviously would make it all the more difficult to revise any of the policies then tentatively agreed upon. <sup>1</sup>

By September the great powers had carried their theoretically private discussions to the point of agreement on general principles, namely that there should be a world-wide organisation, naturally under their own leadership; and to the point of deadlock on a crucial issue of detail. The problem concerned voting procedure on the Security Council, on which was to rest 'primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.' All four powers agreed that sanctions should only be ordered with their concurrence. This departed from **League of Nations**

precedent only in that it limited the veto to the great powers on the Council. The Russians wished, however, that the veto should go further than this. They wished in particular that it should cover substantive questions, that is questions other than procedure, and should be valid even when one of the great powers was party to a dispute brought before the Security Council. After some discussion and long delay the Russian Government announced on 13 September its final and unalterable decision to insist on 'the principle of Great Power unanimity. In their opinion a world organisation embodying this principle would be quite acceptable to smaller powers whose one ultimate concern was security <sup>2</sup>.' The British and American governments said with equal firmness that they could not accept a system which placed great powers 'above the law' and that they doubted whether other **United Nations** governments could be induced to accept such a system. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McNeill, pp. 508–9.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to NZ Minister of External Affairs, 15 Sep 1944.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, and Stettinius, *Roosevelt and the Russians*, p. 28. Roosevelt does not seem to have felt any incompatibility between his rejection of the idea that one of the parties to a quarrel should sit on the jury in its own case and his support of the Great Power veto on enforcement action.

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The deadlock could not be broken, and the sensible course was adopted of publishing the very considerable material on which agreement had been reached. 'The question of voting procedure in the Security Council', together with 'several other questions', was noted as being 'still under consideration.' Among these other questions, incidentally, was that of membership of the new organisation. This was declared to be 'open to all peace-loving states.' This cautious phrase decently concealed a further unresolved problem. The Russians tended to think of the new organisation as being a continuation of the wartime



alliance. They disliked an American suggestion that a group of non-belligerent states which was predominantly Latin-American should be admitted to it, and their counter-suggestion was that the sixteen Soviet republics should become members. This view caused consternation in the British and American delegations and by mutual consent the whole matter was dropped. <sup>1</sup> The remarkable thing about the **Dumbarton Oaks** conference was the area of common ground. It reflected, in fact, the relationship among the Allies while **Germany** was still a formidable enemy and before the Russians had established the Lublin government in **Poland**. 'The surprising thing,' observed Stalin piously, 'is not that differences exist, but that there are so few of them and that as a rule in practically every case they are resolved in a spirit of unity and co-ordination among the three great powers <sup>2</sup>.'

The great powers' proposals for the future world organisation were published on 9 October 1944 and thus the whole matter was thrown open for debate. <sup>3</sup> Three days later Fraser outlined New Zealand's attitude towards them. He praised the proposal that national air forces should be immediately available for combined international enforcement action. This, he thought, was at least a move in the direction of an international police force which his government had long advocated. His main point of criticism was the absence of an express provision, which had been in the Covenant of the **League of Nations**, for defence of the political independence and territorial integrity of member states. Nor did it appear to him that the proposed arrangements for preventing and removing threats to peace were, at first glance, an improvement on the provisions of the Covenant. He expressed satisfaction, however, that a good beginning had been made and said that the Government would examine the proposals with the utmost care before formulating its final views. 'We hope,' he concluded, 'that the Charter will be

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<sup>1</sup> McNeill, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted McNeill, p. 510, from Stalin, *Great Patriotic War*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>3</sup> **Department of External Affairs, *The Dumbarton Oaks Proposals*, Publication No. 7, 1944.** It may be noted that the proposals as issued by the British and American governments were unsigned, since the Russians had made it known that they would not be associated with any proposals arising at **Dumbarton Oaks** which were signed by **China**.

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drafted in clear and simple language. It should be definite in its terms and it must express those moral principles which can be easily understood, which inspire universal acceptance and in the absence of which no machinery or security system can avail in the preservation of world peace <sup>1</sup>.'

The views thus sketched were amplified and sharpened in discussions held in November in **Wellington** with an Australian delegation headed by Herbert Evatt. The two dominions agreed that 'all members should pledge themselves to co-operate in carrying out, by force if need be, the decisions of the organisation for the preservation of peace.' They thought that 'it should be a positive principle of the organisation, openly declared and binding upon all members, that the territorial integrity and political independence of members should be preserved against a change by force or threat of force from another power.' Insistence on this last provision, indeed, was 'the specific New Zealand contribution to this whole debate.' They agreed, too, in stating the principle of trusteeship in its most comprehensive form.

No pronouncement was made, however, on the vexed question of voting procedure. Presumably, the **New Zealand Government** at this stage did not attach great importance to the issue. In September Berendsen for New Zealand had said that if **Russia** proved adamant it might be possible to accept a veto for great powers even when their own cases were in question. <sup>2</sup> In October, considered New Zealand judgment appears to have been that she 'prefers equal voting privileges, but would accept a Great Power veto.' Her government was not alarmed at the possibility that the veto might be used as a cover for aggression, and on

the other hand, pointed out the precedent of the imperfectly legal action taken by the League in the Abyssinian crisis: 'if the situation is one in which the other Great Powers are prepared to take collective action against the dissentient Power, they will probably find the means of doing so, and of enlisting the co-operation of the Organisation as a whole, even if there is no formally valid resolution <sup>3</sup>.' Fraser's own attitude was still tentative. We wish, he said, to avoid any action, however small, that might cause a breach with **Russia**, 'because she is essential to the peace of the world', but the price paid for her co-operation would be exceedingly high if the smaller powers merely acquiesced in their own submergence. 'It is difficult and it is delicate, but I do not think anything can ever be lost by a declaration of the fundamental democratic principles <sup>4</sup>.'

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<sup>1</sup> *Dominion*, 12 Oct 1944.

<sup>2</sup> NZ Minister, **Washington**, to Minister of External Affairs, 14 Sep 1944.

<sup>3</sup> New Zealand paper for discussions with **Australia**, November 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Record of conversation attached to proceedings of 4th meeting, 6 Nov 1944.

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The deadlock on voting procedure was at last broken on Roosevelt's initiative. On 5 December 1944 he proposed to Churchill and Stalin a complicated compromise formula. Its effect would be, he explained, that the parties to a dispute should abstain from voting so long as the matter concerned was one of the pacific settlement of disputes, or of peaceful adjustment. On the other hand, unanimity of the permanent members of the Council would be needed in all decisions relating to the determination of a threat to peace or action for removal of such a threat, or for the suppression of aggression or other breaches of the

peace. Roosevelt argued that by accepting such a compromise the great powers would strengthen their position as guardians of the peace without deviating from the principle of unanimity in all decisions affecting their vital interests. <sup>1</sup> New Zealand, being consulted on this new plan, reported in January 1945 that she saw some difficulties of interpretation, but 'would welcome an extension of the area within which equality of voting rights as between Greater and Smaller powers is to prevail. If, therefore, it is impossible to secure Soviet adherence to a proposal that the votes of the parties to a dispute should in no case be counted, which is a solution which the **New Zealand Government** would prefer, that government would support the President's proposal as offering a balance of advantage <sup>2</sup>.' In the following month, Roosevelt's formula was placed before the **Yalta** Conference, with Churchill's acquiescence, and with information that it was satisfactory to the self-governing dominions. <sup>3</sup> After some thought it was accepted by Stalin; which represented, perhaps, the main concession made from the Russian side to the general settlement which appeared to be reached on that occasion.

In February 1945, then, the **Yalta** Conference clarified the situation from the point of view of the great powers: an international organisation was about to be set up with American and Russian participation; and planned along lines which were fairly clear in the minds of the Big Three. It did nothing, however, to meet the strong feeling among the middle and lesser powers that they should have their say in the matter. Evatt spoke for New Zealand as well as for his own country, and indeed for dominion opinion as a whole, when he raised this matter forcefully. He wrote that Russian and American adherence to a world organisation at the earliest possible moment was vital. However, 'we would not wish to be bound to any cut and dried scheme before a general conference. In other words there must be a maximum participation by Powers other than the

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<sup>1</sup> SSDA to Minister of External Affairs, 18 Dec 1944. Cf. Stettinius, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Minister of External Affairs to SSDA, 9 Jan 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Stettinius, p. 137.

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**Big Three in shaping the details and procedure of the organisation <sup>1</sup>.’ Some vigorous discussion followed among Commonwealth countries, and the **United Kingdom** warmly welcomed a South African suggestion that representatives of these countries should gather for a preliminary discussion of the issues involved before the proposed general conference of the members of the **United Nations** was held. <sup>2</sup>**

**Commonwealth spokesmen accordingly assembled in **London** in April. By this time Fraser had apparently decided that the veto problem as it had emerged was a very serious one indeed, but that plans for the establishment of a world organisation were already so well advanced that he could express his criticisms on this one aspect without jeopardising the eventual establishment of such an organisation, on which all agreed in setting great store. He accordingly became an outspoken critic of the veto. ‘Surely,’ he said, ‘it was the utter negation of any attempt to prevent aggression if, while small powers could be easily suppressed, those big states which entered upon aggressive policies could get off scot free.’ The proposals, he said, did not provide the means for achieving their avowed objects. ‘If the proposed world organisation had been in existence when **Germany** attacked **Poland** in 1939, and **Germany** had been one of the Great Powers with a permanent seat on the Security Council, the world could have done nothing to stop her.’ This line of thinking was not unchallenged. Attlee, for example, remarked ‘it was not enough to set up machinery. Aggressors could not be stopped, the hook could not be put in the nose of Leviathan, by means of a paper system. The control or checking of aggression relied entirely upon the will of the Powers comprising an international organisation.’ Such realism was, in fact, in line with a good deal of New Zealand's thinking and had been expressed at the Australian and New Zealand talks in November. British delegates, moreover, courteously hinted that Fraser**

had abruptly and substantially changed his mind since New Zealand's earlier acquiescence. This was, in fact, not quite the case. It seems that up to this point Fraser was, through an odd sequence of events, unaware of the exact position; for he had been visiting the **Pacific** islands at the time when cabinet had had to reach a decision. On this occasion, though hard pressed, he would do no more than promise to give continued thought to the matter; and he made it clear that his present intention was to vote against the veto at **San Francisco**. He was almost equally firm on the allied issue of the part that the small powers were to play in the new system. 'It was obvious,' he said, 'that the large Powers must have a big say', but 'the prospect for

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<sup>1</sup> Evatt to Fraser, 6 Jan 1945.

<sup>2</sup> SSSA to NZ Minister of External Affairs, 17 Jan 1945.

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world peace was not good if the small nations were not to have an adequate say.' He asked the British delegation to explain 'why at **Dumbarton Oaks** it had been decided that peace could be maintained by the Great Powers but that the Small Powers should have no effective voice.' He added firmly that 'this conception would have to be radically altered at **San Francisco**.'

At **San Francisco** Fraser fought hard along the lines he had indicated to his Commonwealth colleagues in these preliminary discussions. On 3 May he launched a forthright attack on the veto, as agreed between the great powers. This time he had an answer to Attlee's realism. 'There is a great difference,' he said, 'between a nation defying the Council in violation of its pledge to accept, observe and morally abide by the decision, and a nation being legally empowered to exercise defiance of the Security Council.... It is also clear that if the veto is exercised in such a case defiantly, and perhaps even cynically, the faith of men and of nations in the World Organisation would collapse.' If the veto, wrong as he thought it in principle, could nevertheless not be avoided, he said

it should be restricted exclusively to the matter of enforcement action against aggressors. Fraser also took particular exception to the opportunity which Roosevelt's compromise had left open to the great powers of using the veto in the preliminary stages of handling a dispute in which they were not themselves involved. <sup>1</sup>

Long discussions followed, and New Zealand supported an Australian amendment to restrict the veto to measures involving the use of force. In practice the **United States** delegation were the strongest defenders of the veto and discussion became at times heated and personal. On one occasion Senator Tom Connally pointed 'an accusing finger' at Berendsen and is reported to have said, 'You, Mr Berendsen, where would you be today if the **United States** had had to ask the **United Nations** for permission to defend your country even before the South Pacific had run red with American blood?' Eloquence apart, however, the unanswerable case for the veto was simply that the great powers were so determined to have it that, unless it were established, there would be no **United Nations Organisation**. The New Zealand delegation judged that 'the veto in the form proposed was repugnant to the wishes of practically every member except the Great Powers and those who by policy or interest made it a point of always supporting the Great Powers <sup>2</sup>.' Yet, as was to be expected, the Australian amendment was defeated; there were 20 votes to 10 with 15 abstentions.

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<sup>1</sup> **Department of External Affairs, *New Zealand and the San Francisco Conference*, Publication No. 10.**

<sup>2</sup> **Department of External Affairs, *United Nations Conference on International Organisation* Publication No. 11, p. 78.**

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When the final text of the veto clauses was put to the vote New Zealand abstained lest the provision should lack its two-thirds majority. 'As it had become abundantly clear that the Charter could not be obtained without the veto in the form suggested,' reported the



delegation, 'it was on the whole, the wise and proper course at that stage not to vote against the veto and thereby possibly wreck the Charter, but to abstain from voting, making plain to the Conference and the world the reasons for so doing <sup>1</sup>.' The matter therefore was closed, with New Zealand adopting her historical position. She expressed her own judgment with cogency and at times with vehemence. Yet her appraisal of her own influence was realistic and she accepted the inevitable with dignity.

Throughout these discussions New Zealand appeared very much as the independent small power, and not at all as belonging to a Commonwealth bloc. Indeed, as a great power, **Britain** was on this issue in the opposing camp; even if her refusal of further compromise was, like that of the **United States**, primarily due to belief that the existence of the veto was a necessary condition of Russian co-operation. New Zealand acted more often in accord with other dominions, particularly **Australia**, with whom her co-operation was close and continuous. Again, according to Fraser's report, ' **Belgium**, the **Netherlands**, Mexico, **Greece**, **Egypt**, **Brazil**, **Chile** and Cuba' were states with whom 'in many important respects we shared a mutual understanding, sympathy and enthusiasm <sup>2</sup>.' From New Zealand's point of view, the whole conference was something like a climax in the development of her international status. She was fortified by prior consultation with sister British nations in **London**, and by their friendly presence in **San Francisco**. But 'without impairment of the essential unity and solidarity of the British Commonwealth', <sup>3</sup> she freely and candidly advocated her own individual policy with respect both to the veto and to other matters only less important.

The most significant of these was, perhaps, New Zealand's long struggle to have included in the Charter definite guarantees binding all members to come to the aid of a victim of aggression. An intimation, which was not followed up, that the **United Kingdom** might accept something of this nature had come to New Zealand in rather a curious way in November 1944. At that time the United Kingdom Government



was making great efforts to persuade the Polish government-in-exile to accept the Curzon line as their eastern frontier without further delay. In the course of this discussion the Poles inquired urgently whether **Britain** would guarantee the  
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<sup>1</sup> **Department of External Affairs**, Publication No. 11, p. 79; *NZPD*, Vol. 268, p. 574; Mansergh, *Documents*, Vol. II, p. 1096.

<sup>2</sup> **Department of External Affairs**, Publication No. 11, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

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pendence

and integrity of the new **Poland**. They were told—so New Zealand was informed—that the British Government would be prepared to give a guarantee jointly with the Russians, and that ‘this Anglo-Soviet guarantee would in our view remain valid until effectively merged in the general guarantee which it is hoped may be afforded by the projected world organisation <sup>1</sup>.’ The proposal fell through as a result of Polish intransigence, but the circumstance that another guarantee to **Poland** had been offered without consulting the Dominions, combined with the apparent departure from the British line at **Dumbarton Oaks**, led to some reflection in the External Affairs Department. It seems, nevertheless, that no official comment was sent from New Zealand. However, during the Commonwealth discussions in **London** in April 1945, New Zealand played a lone hand in pressing her consistent principle of a clear-cut guarantee of territorial integrity. Even Evatt for **Australia** suggested a compromise formula, while Field-Marshal Smuts and others stressed the difficulty of defining aggression. ‘Apart from territorial aggression,’ said Smuts, ‘there were nowadays more dangerous and insidious methods of propaganda and ideological attack.’ Attlee remarked, too, that ‘modern methods of aggression were very subtle and might, for instance, begin

with wireless propaganda and economic penetration.' He thought that the danger of an ideological war 'was all the greater now that possible methods of aggression were so varied.'

Fraser remained unconvinced, and he brushed aside the difficulties of defining aggression. Smuts and Attlee seemed to him to be talking about prospective conflict between **Russia** and the West. In so far as this remained a clash of ideas, he could not see how the international organisation could handle it, and he went on to express the misgivings, quoted elsewhere, at the prospect of an ideological war along these lines.

He could not, however, convince his Commonwealth colleagues. In place of the guarantee which he proposed for every member's territorial integrity, they agreed to press for a rule expressly debarring all members of the new organisation 'from the use of force against one another's territorial integrity and political independence.' This formula was by no means satisfactory to New Zealand and at **San Francisco** her delegation made a further vigorous effort to put more firmness into the guarantee against attack. The same arguments were used as at **London**, and a number of amendments were moved in committee work. The most important of these proposed to insert a new clause into the Charter: 'all members of the organisation undertake collectively to resist every act of aggression

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<sup>1</sup> SSSA to Minister of External Affairs, 3 Nov 1944.

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against any member.' The proposal, reported Fraser later, 'was opposed throughout by the Great Powers and by those other delegations whose policy it was invariably to support the Great Powers.' It was opposed by both the **United States** and **Britain**, but was passed in the main committee by 26 votes to 18. This was four votes short of the necessary two-thirds majority, but, reported Fraser, 'it was a matter of great encouragement to observe the very wide and vociferous measure of approval with which the New Zealand proposal was received <sup>1</sup>.'

**This campaign culminated, then, in honourable defeat, and much the same can be said of the efforts made by New Zealand and other small powers to obtain, through the General Assembly, a greater share in the determination of action to check aggression. New Zealand pressed forward an amendment requiring that, except in cases of urgency, the Security Council's decisions should be endorsed by a simple majority of the General Assembly. 'The present proposals,' said Berendsen, 'would bind the smaller powers for all time to send their sons to die as a result of decisions taken by unknown men in unknown circumstances based on unknown principles <sup>2</sup>.' In the Prime Minister's more temperate phrase, 'in matters of peace and war no responsible government, large or small, can sign away the right to pass judgment itself, in its own Parliament and through its own Constitution and forms.' New Zealand, he said, had not shirked her responsibilities in war. She 'asks now to be given an opportunity to meet adequately her responsibilities in time of peace. We are not prepared to be relegated to a position of "theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die" <sup>3</sup>.' The New Zealand amendment was, of course, defeated; but there was some recognition of the principle behind it in the partial acceptance of another amendment on the same subject proposed by the Canadians.**

**The Canadian amendment became Article 44 of the Charter, under which the Security Council, after deciding that force shall be used, must give members not represented on that Council the chance to participate in its decisions concerning the use of any contingents they might be called upon to provide. This article was some concession to the smaller powers' wish to participate in decisions involving the use of force, but it was far from meeting the New Zealand viewpoint. In that it allowed the possibility that a considerable number of members would not be asked to take action in a crisis and 'therefore have neither voice nor vote', it tended 'to destroy the universality and the authority of the Organisation at its most critical**

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**<sup>1</sup> Department of External Affairs, Publication No. 11, pp. 22-6.**

<sup>2</sup> **Auckland Star**, 12 May 1945.

<sup>3</sup> **Department of External Affairs, New Zealand and the San Francisco Conference**, Publication No. 10, p. 6.

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point <sup>1</sup>.' Further, though these arguments were not freely developed at the time, it seemed to open the door to reservations and negotiations on the use of force, and thus undermine the automatic and universal character of action against aggression. This was a matter on which New Zealand had always laid great stress, and it was consistent with her established policy and with her advocacy of the rights of the Assembly that she should sponsor an important minor move to make more efficient the action of the Security Council. Under the **Dumbarton Oaks** proposal there was grave doubt as to the machinery by which member states should make agreements as to the use of armed forces; so at least thought New Zealand, **Australia** and **India**. It was argued that, as the provisions stood, members were left to make these agreements when and with whom they chose; a situation almost bound to lead to 'indefinite delay' and 'inextricable confusion.' The great powers, remarked the New Zealand delegation acidly, made 'an abortive attempt ... to defend the **Dumbarton Oaks** provisions as they stood', but the Dominions' viewpoint was generally accepted by the committee. The final result was the acceptance of a New Zealand amendment making it clear that such agreements should be made, as soon as possible, with the Security Council and on its initiative. <sup>2</sup>

The adoption of this machinery clause was perhaps the main concrete fruit of New Zealand's two months' battle to bring the **Dumbarton Oaks** security proposals more into line with the views she had expressed in 1936. Yet there were other threads of continuous importance. Running right through Peter Fraser's report as chairman of the delegation is the problem of the relationship between great powers and small, and indeed the suggestion that on many vital issues there was almost a permanent opposition between a more or less coherent

group of great powers, plus their camp-followers, and those of the middle and lesser rank who were bold enough to speak their own minds. In this latter group the Dominions were strongly present, and New Zealanders were among the most persistent and cogent spokesmen. Fraser, Berendsen, Wilson and McIntosh represented contemporary New Zealand, but behind them stood generations of statesmen who in their time had wrestled, often unconsciously, with the same problem: Seddon, Vogel and Grey; Hughes and Deakin and Parkes; Laurier and MacDonald; Smuts and Hertzog; and, indeed, **Washington** and Adams, Franklin and Burke. How many powerful countries work in harness with small, determined, far-distant kindred communities? How can the warm realities of democratic behaviour be built not only into the life of a great power, but into a community comprising many races

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<sup>1</sup> **Department of External Affairs, Publication No. 11, p. 89.**

<sup>2</sup> **Article 43; and Department of External Affairs, Publication No. 11, p. 90.**

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widely scattered? These are problems in which English and Scots, Welsh and Irish, can claim long experience, even if that experience has not been as unique as they sometimes claim. New Zealand's vigorous use at **San Francisco** of the privileged, responsible position given by dominion status was in an honourable tradition: that of **Britain's** long, turbulent political evolution with its odd blends of discipline with prickly individualism, of idealism and respect for principle with realism and skilful opportunism.

Neither vigour of protest nor urgency of argument could, of course, shake the plain fact of great-power dominance. No constitutional nicety could greatly alter the result if the Big Three were agreed; nor could it reconcile them if they disagreed. Half concealed among the debates of the concluding months of the war were problems which had little to do with details of the Charter, with voting procedure, or even with ethics or

political principles. Would the wartime co-operation achieved between **Britain**, the **United States** and **Russia**, which was bumpy and uneven, but in the upshot adequate, continue or dissolve? Could Britain, with such associates as she could muster, hold her own with **America** and **Russia** politically, economically and morally? Would Western dominance of the world, symbolised in the giant strength of the **United States** and the power of Western ideas in **Russia**, continue? Was there any challenge brewing—in **Asia** and northern **Africa** for example—to create a problem of adjustment for the stiff minds of men bred in **Europe** and **North America** in the half century that closed when atom bombs fell on **Japan**? Much of the legal and constitutional machinery painfully constructed at **San Francisco** proved irrelevant to such gigantic problems: both the debates and the provisions resulting from them may have had their main importance in their tendency to make power politics operate more or less smoothly, and with more or less deference to the idealistic and humanitarian aspirations which were reflected, to an exceptional degree, in New Zealand pronouncements on foreign policy.

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**THIS** book is largely based on the confidential records of the **New Zealand Government**, more particularly but not exclusively those of the Prime Minister's Department and the **Department of External Affairs**. These records are unpublished—save for the useful but necessarily limited selection included in the War History programme—and in the foreseeable future unpublishable. Their physical bulk is enormous. Documents of purely historical interest are filed along with others which are closely associated with current business or with the affairs of other governments, and retain an obviously confidential character. Even the location of particular documents is not fixed: they may still be rearranged to provide documentation for departmental studies. Some few memoranda, being on wartime paper, were on the point of disintegration when consulted, and may never be seen again. Others remain outside the official system altogether. None of them can be consulted without permission. In all these circumstances it seemed inappropriate to burden the text with the complex symbols used in departmental filing systems, or in general to give detailed references to documents which remain inaccessible. Such symbols and references are, however, recorded in material deposited with the **War History Branch** of the Department of Internal Affairs.

This material includes correspondence—some of **Lord Freyberg's** comments are cited in the text—but ranges through newspaper cuttings and such collections as the Chiefs-of-Staff papers to 'file material' proper and finally to volumes which in bulk and precision differ little from books of a high standard. The general plan of War History research envisaged a history of each government department, and a series of



'narratives' which would accumulate the facts about specified topics and provide a key to sources. I am particularly indebted to the fine work of this character done under my direction by Messrs Witheford and O'Shea and Miss Lissington. References to it, and to other narratives and departmental histories, are given in the typescript version of this book, together with indications of filed sources, whether or not they have passed through this particular form of scrutiny. A copy of this version, together with copies of both histories and narratives, is held by the **War History Branch**. Where possible, quotations in the printed text taken from confidential documents are supported by dates, the names of correspondents, etc., or by reference to such published material as has been drawn upon in the files. It should be noted, in particular, that the newspaper cuttings collected by government information services have been of great help in some areas of research as an index to a rich but normally uncharted mass of material.

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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## GLOSSARY

### *Glossary*

<b>Actg</b>	<b>Acting</b>
<b>A to J</b>	<b><i>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</i></b>
<b>CGS</b>	<b>Chief of the General Staff</b>
<b>CID</b>	<b>Committee of Imperial Defence</b>
<b>CIGS</b>	<b>Chief of the Imperial General Staff</b>
<b>Col.</b>	<b>Column ( <i>Hansard</i> )</b>
<b>COMSOPAC</b>	<b>Commander South Pacific</b>
<b>COS</b>	<b>Chiefs of Staff</b>
<b>DCGS</b>	<b>Deputy Chief of the General Staff</b>
<b>EPS</b>	<b>Emergency Precautions Scheme</b>
<b>GGNZ</b>	<b>Governor-General of New Zealand</b>
<b>GOC</b>	<b>General Officer Commanding</b>
<b>HC</b>	<b>High Commissioner</b>
<b>HMG</b>	<b>His Majesty's Government</b>
<b>ILO</b>	<b>International Labour Organisation</b>
<b>ME</b>	<b><i>Middle East</i></b>
<b>NZEF</b>	<b>New Zealand Expeditionary Force</b>
<b>NZHC</b>	<b>High Commissioner for New Zealand (in <b>London, Canberra or Ottawa</b>)</b>
<b>NZPD</b>	<b><i>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</i></b>
<b>ONS</b>	<b><i>Organisation for National Security</i></b>
<b>PM</b>	<b>Prime Minister</b>
<b>RSA</b>	<b>Returned Services Association</b>
<b>SIB</b>	<b>Security Intelligence Bureau</b>
<b>SSDA</b>	<b>Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs</b>
<b>tel.</b>	<b>telegram</b>
<b>UKHC</b>	<b>High Commissioner for the <b>United Kingdom</b></b>
<b>UNO</b>	<b><i>United Nations Organisation</i></b>
<b>UNRRA</b>	<b>United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration</b>
<b>Wgtn</b>	<b><i>Wellington</i></b>



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# POLITICAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

## [BACKMATTER]

**This volume was produced and published by the War**

**History Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs**

*Editor-in-Chief*

*Sub-Editor*

*Illustrations Editor* MISS J. P. WILLIAMS

*and Indexer*

*Archives Officer*

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**R. E. OWEN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND—**

**1958**