

1909.
NEW ZEALAND.

DESPATCHES

REGARDING THE IMPERIAL CONFERENCE AND THE DREAD- NOUGHT OFFER.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

Prime Minister's Office,
Wellington, 20th March, 1909.

Memo. for Cabinet.

THERE is at the present moment a crisis in the affairs of the Empire. The cables recently published regarding the keeping of the British Navy up to a standard that will insure the safety of all parts of the Empire are of a most disquieting nature. So much so that I feel that the time has arrived when New Zealand should do something more than it is now doing to show its practical assistance and support of the British Navy in such a way that the moral effect of New Zealand's co-operation would, quite irrespective of the money value, be of more than ordinary moment.

We are now under an agreement to pay £100,000 a year as a contribution to the British Navy. This is doubtless in the ordinary sense a large sum, but is comparatively small when the tremendous interests at stake are considered, and is nothing approaching what we are reasonably and fairly expected to contribute to help the old land to maintain that which is essential for their and our welfare also—namely, the supremacy of the sea, and which, in my opinion, can only be insured by her having a greatly superior fleet of battleships to that of any other Power.

For your consideration I propose that we should offer to the British Government at least one, and, if necessary, two first-class battleships of the Dreadnought or latest types, and that the offer should be on behalf of New Zealand and at our own cost; the battleships to be controlled both in peace and war time absolutely by the British Admiralty.

If the offer is accepted by the British Government we must, of course, ask Parliament for authority to raise a special loan, and, in addition, to providing interest upon the amount required for a sinking fund of 1 per cent. for the redemption of the loan. At the outside the cost of each of the battleships would be two millions, probably one and three-quarter million each, but in estimating the position I take the former amount as the approximate cost. I have no doubt in my own mind that for such a purpose we could obtain a loan at a rate of 3 per cent. which, with 1 per cent. sinking fund, would amount, if the battleships cost the full sum of £2,000,000, to £80,000 per annum for one, and if two were obtained, to £160,000 per annum; so that, summed up from the standpoint of the cost to the people of New Zealand, the amount is not large, and if considered as an insurance premium upon the value of the national estate, to say nothing of the value of the private estate of the people and the keeping open sea routes for the safe conveyance of our produce is anything but a large sum to pay in return for helping to support in a practical way the British Navy, which must be recognised by all as giving us a protection and support against other countries that is really invaluable.

By following the course I am suggesting we would in a most practical and substantial way demonstrate to any opposing nation of the British Empire that not only have they to count upon the magnificent work the old land in this respect has done in the past by building and maintaining a powerful and unequalled Navy—and will, I am confident, continue to do so in the future—but will also have to reckon in addition the loyal adherence and the practical assistance of her sons in her oversea dominions, and the moral effect of this undertaking would, in my opinion, have a great and far-reaching influence. It would proclaim to the world that the oversea dominions, gradually growing into nationhood, were prepared to help to preserve the power and greatness of the Empire, which for the best part of a century, at comparatively no cost to us, has given us that protection without which that independence and security to our commerce under the British flag would have been impossible in the absence of the British Navy.

Whatever is done should be done at once, and if Cabinet agrees to my proposal, I would transmit it through the Governor to the British Government without delay. The responsibility devolving upon the Government in taking this action is a great one, the refusal of Parliament to sanction it involving as it would the retirement of the Government or an appeal to the people; but I feel confident that the loyalty of the people of New Zealand, voicing itself through their representatives in Parliament, will indorse the action of the Government.

The situation in England to-day is one of tension and serious apprehension, and both in the eyes of England and in the eyes of Europe a prompt and generous assistance would have, in addition to its material value, a moral effect which cannot be over-estimated.

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

[In Cabinet.]

22nd March, 1909.

THE Government to offer to defray the cost of the immediate building and arming of one first-class battleship of the latest type, and if subsequent events show it to be necessary, will provide the cost of a second warship of the same type.

(Signed) J. HISLOP.
Acting-Secretary.

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Woodville.

Wellington, 22nd March, 1909.

THE Prime Minister presents his compliments to His Excellency the Governor, and desires that the following cable be sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies—begins: "The New Zealand Government offers to defray the cost of the immediate building and arming by the British Government of one first-class battleship of the latest type, and if subsequent events show it to be necessary, will also provide the cost of a second warship of the same type."

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Woodville.

Wellington, 22nd March, 1909.

I FEEL sure that in sending telegram *re* Government's offer of a battleship, Your Excellency will be pleased to know that upon the proposal being submitted by me to Cabinet, it received the unanimous endorsement of my colleagues. In advising the Home authorities, I shall be glad if Your Excellency will kindly intimate that the New Zealand Government must of course obtain ratification of Parliament, and such legislation as may be required to make the gift effective, and that in the meantime, any advance necessary for the building of the warship will no doubt be made by the British Government, and any money which the British Government so expends before Parliament meets will be taken over as part of our contribution.

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

DESPATCH from His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Kaikoura North, to the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington.

Kaikoura North, 22nd March, 1909.

HAVE received with pride and satisfaction your telegram regarding New Zealand Government offer to Imperial Government to defray cost of battleship or battleships and have this day cabled accordingly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

(Signed) PLUNKET.

DESPATCH from the SECRETARY of STATE for the COLONIES, London, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Wellington.

London, 23rd March, 1909.

PLEASE hasten to assure your Prime Minister that his message has been received by me with the highest appreciation of the generous and spontaneous offer made on behalf of New Zealand. It will be at once laid before His Majesty's Government.

(Signed) CREWE.

DESPATCH from the SECRETARY of STATE for the COLONIES, London, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Wellington.

London, 24th March, 1909.

I AM commanded by His Majesty the King to inform you that His Majesty is deeply gratified by the patriotic feeling displayed by New Zealand towards Mother Country in their splendid offer, and to convey at once his gratitude and high appreciation for fine patriotism and generosity shown in the magnificent offer made so promptly and spontaneously.

(Signed) CREWE.

DESPATCH from the SECRETARY of STATE for the COLONIES, London, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Wellington.

London, 24th March, 1909.

In further reply your telegram 22nd March, desire you to express to Sir Joseph Ward and to your Government in the warmest terms the feeling of appreciation and gratitude with which His Majesty's Government have received the offer so generously made. In view of the uncertainty that exists as to the character and extent of the demand which may be made on the national resources in the following year, the offer of the Government of New Zealand to bear within that period the cost of providing one first-class battleship of the latest type, and of a second of the same type should subsequent events show it to be necessary, is most gratefully accepted by His Majesty's Government. Your Government will doubtless understand that it is impossible to enter into details by telegram, but you will receive at an early date full communication by despatch, as His Majesty's Government desires to consult with the Government of New Zealand as to time it may become appropriate to give effect to their public-spirited proposal. So far as the coming financial year is concerned, the provisions and powers for which sanction is being asked in the Naval Estimates now before Parliament affords ample security.

(Signed) CREWE

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Opotiki.

Wellington, 26th March, 1909.

SIR JOSEPH WARD presents his compliments to His Excellency the Governor and acknowledges the receipt of the telegram of twenty-fourth March forwarded by Secretary of State for the Colonies conveying the message from His Majesty the King. He will be glad if His Excellency will be good enough to convey through the Secretary of State to His Majesty the King the New Zealand Government's deep sense of gratitude for the gracious message, and for His Majesty's generous recognition of New Zealand's offer of a warship to the Mother-country. The people of New Zealand are pleased to evince in a tangible way their loyalty to the King to help in maintaining the strength of the Empire.

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Opotiki.

Wellington, 26th March, 1909.

THE Prime Minister presents his compliments to His Excellency the Governor, and acknowledges receipt of the telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies of 24th instant, and would be glad if he would send the following reply to the Secretary of State—begins: "The Government and people of New Zealand are much gratified at acceptance of their offer. Their sole desire is to assist the Empire as far as New Zealand's resources permit in maintaining its naval supremacy. They feel that the Imperial Government can best determine what shape and time of contribution will best effect that end, and therefore, as desired by the Imperial Government, the New Zealand Government will await details in despatch."

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

DESPATCH from His EXCELLENCY the Governor, Kawhia, to the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington.

Kawhia, 3rd May, 1909.

The Governor has received the following telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated London, 30th April:—

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, President of the Imperial Conference, has desired me to ask you to convey the following message to the Prime Minister. Message begins: "It will no doubt be within your knowledge that on the 29th March the Canadian House of Commons passed a resolution to the following effect." Resolution begins: "Resolutions of the Canadian House of Commons, March 29th, 1909. That this House fully recognises the duty of the people of Canada and their increase in numbers and wealth to assume in larger measure the responsibilities of national defence. The House is of opinion that under present constitutional relations between the Mother Country and the self-governing dominions the payment of regular and periodical contribution to the Imperial Treasury for naval and military purposes it will not, so far as Canada is concerned be the most satisfactory solution of the question of defence. The House will cordially approve of any necessary expenditure designed to promote the speedy organization of a Canadian Naval Service in co-operation with and in close relation to the Imperial Navy along the lines suggested by the Admiralty at the last Imperial Conference and in full sympathy with the view that the naval supremacy of Britain is essential to the security of commerce, the safety of the Empire, and the peace of the world. The House expresses its firm conviction that whenever the need arises the Canadian people will be found ready and willing to make any sacrifice that is required to give to the Imperial authorities the most loyal and hearty co-operation in every movement for the maintenance of the integrity and honour of the Empire." Resolution ends. I understand that the Dominion Government propose that its Minister of Defence should come here at an early date to confer with the Imperial naval and military authorities upon technical matters arising on the resolution. His Majesty's Government have also before them recent patriotic proposals made by New Zealand and Australia, proposals most highly appreciated by the Mother Country, and demanding very cordial and careful consideration both as to principle and detail. I desire, therefore, to commend to you the following important suggestion—viz., that a conference of representatives of the self-governing dominions conveyed under the terms of the resolutions of one of the Conference of 1907, which provides that such subsidiary Conferences should be held in London early in next July. The object of the Conference would be to discuss the general questions of naval and military defence of the Empire, with special reference to the Canadian resolution and to the proposals from New Zealand and Australia to which have referred. I assume that as the resolution would be generally upon technical or quasi-technical naval and military matters that the other Governments of the self-governing dominions would elect to be represented as in the case of Canada by their Ministers of Defence or, failing them, by some other members of the Government assisted by expert advice, but it is entirely for the Government of New Zealand to decide the precise form of its representation. The Conference would, of course, be of a purely consultative character. It would be held in private, and its deliberations would be assisted by the presence of members of other expert advisers of His Majesty's Government. I am addressing a similar message to the other members of the Imperial Conference. Message ends. I am strongly of opinion that as early confidential exchange of views between His Majesty's Government and the Governments of His Majesty's self-governing dominions beyond the seas would be of the greatest mutual advantage, and I therefore trust that your Prime Minister and his colleagues will see their way to adopt the proposal." End of Lord Crewe's cable.

(Signed) PLUNKET.

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Kawhia.

Wellington, 3rd May, 1909.

YOUR Excellency's telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies dated 30th April, I will bring the matter before my colleagues in Wellington, on Wednesday, the 5th instant, my absence from Wellington preventing my doing so earlier, and I shall be glad if your Excellency will inform the Secretary of State accordingly. I think there can be no doubt about our agreeing to request of the Secretary of State, but the month of July, as far as New Zealand is concerned, is impossible, as it is in the middle of our session. I will communicate with your Excellency again on Wednesday.

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, New Plymouth.

6th May, 1909.

IN further reference to the Secretary of State for the Colonies' cable of the 3rd instant *re* Imperial Naval Conference. To enable Ministers to attend as requested an early session of Parliament would be necessary, with the object of obtaining supplies and adjourning during the absence of Ministers in England, this adjournment being absolutely necessary, inasmuch as this is a new Parliament and is the first session of that Parliament. If it is necessary that New Zealand should be represented it would be desirable that the date should be fixed not earlier than the last week in July. On receipt of reply from the Home Government Parliament will be called for the 10th June for the purpose of considering the matter, that being the earliest possible date under the existing prorogation. The opinion of Ministers here is that the representations of all parts of the Empire at the Conference is essential and that the course the Home Government is taking is the right one and is in the best interests of the Empire. They recognise that it would be a matter of much regret if through not being able to postpone the meeting of the new Parliament New Zealand could not be represented at the Conference.

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

DESPATCH from the SECRETARY of STATE for the COLONIES to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR.

London, 12th May, 1909.

WITH reference to your telegram of 6th May, I desire in name of Prime Minister, and of His Majesty's Government to express their gratification at readiness of Dominion's Government to take part in Conference. I hope that as result of communication now proceeding, it will be possible shortly to fix definitely date for its meeting convenient to all Governments.

(Signed) CREWE.

DESPATCH from His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Waiouru, to the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington.

Waiouru, 18th May, 1909.

THE Governor has today received the following telegram, dated 17th May, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies: "Please inform your Ministers that Government of Commonwealth of Australia and Government of Canada have accepted invitation to Defence Conference proposed in my telegram of 30th April, and that Governments of South African Colonies will authorise delegates sent Home in connection with union of South African States to attend Conference. In these circumstances, I earnestly hope that the Dominion of New Zealand will be represented, and that it may be possible for Sir Joseph Ward, as Minister of Defence and Prime Minister, to be spared from his important duties to attend Conference. It is now proposed to hold Conference at end of July, as that date will be convenient for the other delegates, and will, I hope, be also convenient to your Prime Minister."

(Signed) PLUNKET

DESPATCH from the Right Hon. the PRIME MINISTER, Wellington, to His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Auckland.

Wellington, 19th May, 1909.

THE Prime Minister presents his compliments to His Excellency the Governor, and will be glad if he will telegraph Secretary of State acknowledging receipt of telegram dated 17th May, and intimating to him that the importance of the Naval Conference is fully recognised by the New Zealand Government, and efforts will be made in the direction indicated; and the Secretary of State for the Colonies will be advised as soon as the Prime Minister is in a position to do so.

(Signed) J. G. WARD.

Resolution.

The Hon. T. Y. Duncan proposed, That this meeting of members of the House, recognising the vital importance to the Empire of the impending Naval Conference, considers it necessary that New Zealand should be represented at such Conference, and that in view of the important part New Zealand proposes to take in Imperial naval defence, such representation should be by the Prime Minister of New Zealand. This meeting further considers that as this is the first session of a new Parliament, it is expedient that the Prime Minister should be in his place to explain the policy of his Government to the House, and that therefore Parliament should, after making the necessary financial arrangements to enable the business of the country to be carried on, be prorogued until the thirtieth day of September next.