

25 May, 1911.]

IMPERIAL COUNCIL.

[2nd Day.]

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

rightly said, I have a very strong opinion that where the British taxpayers are paying so much out we ought to have some means of bringing about a co-ordination for defence purposes in all parts of the British Empire with a view to doing what is fair to the British taxpayers as well as what is fair to ourselves.

I am in absolute accord with that statement, that it is upon the British Government and upon the British people that we in the oversea Dominions to-day, every one of us, are dependent for our maintenance as portions of the British Empire, and I say that with all respect to the other oversea Dominions who have taken a different course, because the protection of the local British interests that they are involved in does not cease round their own coasts either in Australia or Canada or South Africa or New Zealand. These interests extend far beyond their own coasts, and in my judgment what Mr. Fisher said is correct, that it is the British Government who are carrying out the whole of the responsibilities beyond that limited area, that the divided system which we have in operation does not and cannot protect the ocean routes in which all the oversea Dominions are so much concerned.

Now, may I also be allowed to absolutely repudiate the inference applied to me that I have suggested doing something to bring down the British Government?

Mr. FISHER: Not the Government; I said the system of government that has grown up and been so successful in bringing new countries within the Empire will in future, I believe, bring in others.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Yes, but what I want to say is this, Mr. Asquith, and I say it with all respect to the members of this Conference, that in my judgment there is no proper recognition of the change that is taking place in the oversea Dominions. This is not a question of the oversea Dominions seeking in any way to weaken the great old British Constitution which has done so much for all of us; it is a suggestion for their active co-operation with a view to strengthening for naval defence purposes all portions of the British Empire that are growing with such rapidity that, in my opinion, and I say it advisedly, they cannot provide within a reasonable time requisite defences for oversea purposes for themselves; it requires the co-operation of all parts with the support of the British Government to enable that to be brought about. That is the whole object I had in view all through in submitting these proposals.

I heartily approve of General Botha's view regarding decentralisation and liberty being practically synonymous terms as far as the oversea Dominions are concerned, and, speaking as a New-Zealander, I do not know anything that we could do to strengthen naval defence that would in any way interfere with the decentralisation that exists within our respective parts, and certainly I am not proposing anything in any way to weaken the liberty of any of the people within any portion of the British Dominions. I would be exceedingly sorry to do anything of the kind.

I am working from the standpoint—I recognise it is a different view to the whole of the members of the Conference who have spoken—of having the recognition of the people in our respective Dominions by a voice in connection with matters that are of Imperial concern to them, that are always decided as in the past without their knowledge or vote or without concurrence. Nor have I derogated from anything the British Government has done in that respect in the past, because I think they have always done the best for the Empire as a whole: but the difference between the position to-day and in the past, in my opinion, is that a tremendous growth is going on and will go on in all the oversea Dominions, and that they ought to receive recognition at the hands of the British Government. I am talking in an impersonal sense, not of the present British Government but *the* British Government, and they ought to receive at its hands a recognition of the fact that they have evolved from comparatively weak positions individually to a very full growth, as young nations. The fact remains. The consequences or results of any great naval war that the British Government might be called upon to take part in in the future directly or indirectly affects every portion of the British Dominions, and without consultation they have done, and will be called upon to take, a share in whatever is going on, although