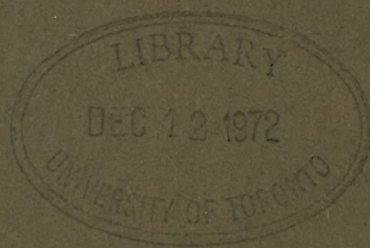


Memorandum on Round Table work

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ROUND TABLE  
WORK



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# MEMORANDUM

ON

## ROUND TABLE WORK

### 1. *Preliminary.*

The English Group have given thorough consideration to the conditions in which the war has left the Imperial problem and to the most useful line of work which these conditions suggest for the Round Table organisation. We are profoundly convinced that a great opportunity now presents itself to Round Table groups throughout the Empire; but we also feel that the very essence of this opportunity lies in a fresh approach to the central problems of the Empire by the groups of each Dominion on their own initiative and from their own distinctive national standpoint. The following letter, which represents our agreed opinion, sets out very briefly the character of the opportunity, as we see it, and the methods which we suggest for making the most of it. We hope that Round Table groups in all the Dominions will endorse our view upon both subjects; but we want to elicit, not to suggest, opinions, and we shall welcome an early reply from all groups to this letter.

### 2. *The Four Alternatives.*

In 1913 we pointed out that the prevailing views on the future of the British Empire might all be grouped under one or other of four broad alternatives:—

- (i.) Maintenance of the *status quo*.
- (ii.) Permanent co-operation.
- (iii.) Separation.
- (iv.) Organic union.

It is desirable to analyse these four alternatives in the light of our subsequent experience.

Events have shown that maintenance of the *status quo* is not a policy. It is true that forms change more slowly than sentiment, and that a certain conservatism is imposed upon even the most radical reformer, not only by the *vis inertiae* of settled habits, but by the urgent necessities of government. In spite of this, the *status quo* has changed, is changing, and will continue to change. The real question is—in what ways and in what direction?

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There are three forces working simultaneously upon the *status quo*. The national sentiment of the Dominions, justly strengthened by the war, demands complete equality of status as between the Dominion Governments and the Government of the United Kingdom. This claim is made by all Dominion statesmen, and acknowledged with emphasis by every one entitled to speak on behalf of the United Kingdom. In form, equality of status is recognised and established. In fact, however, it is modified by two other forces at work. One of these is Imperial sentiment, or the desire for British unity throughout the world, which creates a general anxiety to prevent the establishment of equality of status from taking any definitely separatist intention. The other is the pressure of actual facts and necessities, which keep the Dominion Governments content to leave the general control of foreign relations to the Government of the United Kingdom.

Co-operation is in consequence the policy of the day. It is a matter of continuous compromise, yielding all it can to nationalist sentiment while maintaining the actual unity of the Empire in world-affairs. It is tentative, experimental, and hopelessly illogical. Nevertheless, for the time being, it works; and since it represents the desire of the great mass of democratic opinion throughout the Empire, it is, at the present time and whatever its difficulties, the only practicable policy.

Separation is advocated by a large minority in one Dominion and by a small but active minority in another. It is the product of the narrower form of racial and national sentiment, and is adopted by many because they think that any status but national independence must involve some degree of moral subordination. Such men are deeply stirred by national pride: they are profoundly resentful of forms and expressions which can in any way be represented as survivals of the colonial status: and they are honestly convinced that the nationalism on which their ideals centre cannot reach its full flowering without a break from the Mother Country and the Empire. It is noticeable, however, that separatists do not preach separation as an immediate aim, but only as the ultimate goal. For the time being they are mostly in favour of co-operation, though they scrutinise all practical proposals for that purpose with a jealous eye for the cloven hoof of patronage or centralisation.

Organic union is not advocated by us or by any one else as

a policy which is practicable at the present time. We ourselves are convinced that it affords the only permanent alternative to disruption; but we do not regard it as feasible in the conditions of the moment, nor do we pretend to foresee its ultimate form. Like the separatists, therefore, we believe in co-operation as the policy of the day; but we approach it in a very different spirit from theirs, not merely seeking to postpone disruption as temporarily inconvenient, but hoping to see the sentiment and intelligence of all the British democracies gradually moving towards constitutional forms which will make our common citizenship equal, complete and permanent. Much, however, as we desire this consummation, and firmly as we believe it to be the only permanent alternative to dissolution and collapse, we are convinced that it must depend upon the initiative of the Dominions themselves, which will shape their national policies as their individual geniuses dictate.

### 3. *A Fresh Standpoint.*

Before the war the studies of the Round Table groups were mainly directed to seeing what the British Commonwealth was, and for what principles of civilisation it stood. More especially we tried to formulate a clear-cut conception of the goal or goals to which it was tending. Those studies have, we believe, yielded fruitful results. Where we differ, we know wherein our differences consist; and our co-operative work has done much to clarify opinion on the Imperial question and to make people face the real meaning of their arguments—not least among those who have been most suspicious of the Round Table movement and most critical of its standpoint. The evolution of Mr. J. S. Ewart in Canada is an example of this.

We suggest that the time has now come for the groups to explore the Imperial problem from the opposite side by working out the national policy of their own Dominion to its fullest possible development. To approach the Imperial problem through national policy seems to us likely to be the means of enlisting much keenness and understanding in Round Table work which would be denied to a purely Imperial line of argument. Nationalism is one of the strongest forces of the time, and clear concepts regarding it are imperatively required. The average man, moreover, is normally moved more strongly by national than by Imperial feeling, because the former springs from

his immediate surroundings and from the experiences and necessities of his daily life. The ideal of the White Australia is an example of this: it gives a practical starting point for political study which cannot be found in the discussion of constitutional issues outside the ordinary Australian's experience. Many Australians (perhaps, indeed, a majority) are still not able to consider purely Australian questions from a Commonwealth standpoint, but only from that of their own States. Nor are they peculiar in this. It is a feature of normal democratic opinion everywhere. The right course is to work from what men know and feel and understand to what they do not know and at the first blush see no need to understand. The process is arduous, but it is practical: it is the only method really consonant with democratic statesmanship.

On the other hand, study on these lines is idle if carried out without due regard to the actual facts and realities of international life. It is essential for students to realise that the Empire is jealously regarded from many quarters, which may be able, as the German Empire did, to threaten its very life. It is the arch enemy pursued alike by reactionaries and by revolutionary dreamers in all parts of the world; and wreckers of both kinds receive support from honest Nationalist movements, which persuade themselves in their haste that they can reach their goal only by the collapse of British power. Another and even more urgent reality is the strain upon our material and financial resources, which must necessarily dominate the measures which we can take to maintain our security and strength.

We will give three examples in which the old assumption of security is no longer warranted by the facts. The first of these is sea-power. The strain upon British finances is such that the maintenance of predominant sea-power, effective in its influence at any point, is no longer within the unaided resources of the British Isles. The second is secession. Secession from the Empire is no longer an abstract idea. It is the policy of a large party in South Africa and is to be tested at the polls in February. If General Hertzog wins that election and tries to give his policy practical effect, the minority in South Africa in the last resort will fight. What attitude will the other British people adopt? The third point is the security of the Indian Empire and of our dependencies in the Middle East.



Asiatic unrest is such that we may have to deal with a movement threatening the complete disruption of our Eastern and Middle Eastern power. Is national policy in the Dominions interested in this possibility or not ?

It is idle for any Dominion to consider an independent national future without reference to the fact that, if Imperial security is not definitely undertaken as a joint responsibility by all the British nations, it will in due course collapse. The alternative to Imperial union is not national independence for the Dominions side by side with a British Empire curtailed in extent but wielding its old influence and power. The alternative is national independence in a world in which the British Empire has ceased to exist.

#### 4. *The Method of Work.*

The issues which the groups will be called upon to consider from the fresh standpoint may be roughly summarised under five heads :—

(i) Character of the State—*i.e.*, monarchical or republican ; and if monarchical, how linked to the British Crown.

(ii) Population, trade and commerce, capital, national development, navigation laws, tariffs and preferences.

(iii) Foreign affairs, relation to the League of Nations, Japanese Alliance, method of conducting foreign policy, and diplomatic relations with foreign powers.

(iv) Defence, maintenance of British sea-power, security of communications, protection of India and the Middle East.

(v) Dependencies and subject populations, the principle of mandates, British policy in India, Egypt and other Dependencies.

These are questions which, for the most part, democratic opinion in the Dominions views from a strongly individual national standpoint, and we think that a thorough study of them will yield most valuable results.

Ten years ago the initiative in founding the Round Table organisation came from the present members of the English group ; but the whole value of the work has been due to its co-operative character, and the time has long

passed when Round Table work can properly subsist upon the principle of centralisation. Round Table studies must draw their vitality from the soil of each country in which they are carried on, or they will end in complete sterility.

If the same lines of study are generally adopted, it will be possible for the Round Table groups in each Dominion to set to work at once, group by group, each in its own way, with the certainty that the completed studies throughout the Empire will supplement each other and lend themselves to effective comparison. We suggest that there should be no attempt for the time being to arrive at agreement between the several groups in each Dominion, but that all groups should send us their results at the earliest possible date. We also hope that they will conduct their investigations on the same principles as governed the original Round Table studies. In our opinion, no willing student should be excluded merely by reason of his views on the ultimate goal to which we are tending. The value of the work will be greatly impaired if it does not represent the give-and-take of discussion between different and often opposite stand-points. It is of the essence of our suggestions, not only that the groups should take their own line and work out their conclusions for themselves, but also that they should take into due account all forms of opinion which have any substance in their own democracies, including especially those of Labour.

The main object of their work should be to clarify their own minds and to assist the growth and formation of opinion in each Dominion. We do not look, therefore, to publishing the results in any extended form in the *Round Table Review*, where space is very limited. On the other hand, every Dominion organisation is, of course, free to take its own course and to advocate its own policy in that Dominion's section of the *Review*, and we hope that Dominion groups will also make their work felt in the local Press and on local opinion, not so much with a view to advocating policies as to stimulating interest and spreading real information. The greater danger to the Empire at the moment is not anti-Imperial propaganda but popular vagueness and ignorance.

The following is the order in which we suggest that the work of the groups should be undertaken :—

- (i.) National policy.
- (ii.) Immediate measures of Imperial co-operation.

(iii.) The ultimate issue between national development and Imperial union.

We will end with a rough indication as to the most useful treatment of these three interdependent groups of questions.

#### 5. *The Study of National Policy.*

The first step is to decide the main aim and direction of national policy under the five heads which we enumerated in the last paragraph. We are confident that great value will be derived from this process, and that it will throw a much-needed light as it advances both upon the immediate problem of Imperial co-operation and upon the ultimate question whether Imperial unity is incompatible with the full national development of the Dominions or on the contrary essential to it.

Some examples may be given of the kind of questions which a study of these points will present for answer. If, for instance, the Covenant of the League of Nations is revised at the instance of the United States, do the Dominions consider it more important that they should retain their individual votes or that the British Empire should enter the League as a single State? Are the Dominions prepared to see British sea-power inferior to that of Japan and the United States? Are the Dominions prepared to hold their mandates direct from the League of Nations, and to be answerable individually for their policy in the mandated territories? Are they willing to see Egypt withdrawing from the Empire and setting up as a sovereign Power? If a similar question arose regarding India, what would be their attitude? Are they prepared to submit their trade and immigration policies, including such matters as preferential tariffs, to the jurisdiction of the League of Nations, or alternatively to maintain their own policies against all comers as independent States?

In like manner, we ourselves propose to embark on a study of leading questions with which the United Kingdom is faced. What, for instance, is our policy to be if Germany, Russia and Japan were to drift into a combination hostile to the British Commonwealth, supposing the League of Nations should fail to neutralise such combinations? How are we to deal with the situation should the tide of anarchy which flows from Moscow continue to spread over Asia? Can an Egyptian, Arabian or Turkish power be allowed to

assume control of the Suez Canal ? Could Russia be allowed to assume control of the Dardanelles ? Should one or more of these situations arise, can this country deal with the problem in isolation from the Dominions ?

#### *6. Immediate Measures of Imperial Co-operation.*

When once national policy is set out in outline, it will suggest the subjects in which co-operation is imperative at the present time. The first head mentioned in paragraph four, for instance, must raise the relation of the Dominions to the Crown and cognate questions such as the functions and method of appointment of Governors-General. The third head just as inevitably must raise important questions of co-operation in foreign policy and defence. The questions connected with immigration and tariffs alone cover a wide field ; and it may be noted that, in addition to the other problems confronting the British Empire in the League of Nations, there is the question whether inter-Imperial preference is consonant with the Covenant or not. As questions like this are certain to be raised, the groups can do valuable work by exploring them beforehand and helping the formation of opinion on such lines as they may think right.

The most important consideration in this part of their studies should be the practicability of the measures which they suggest. Imperial co-operation is an urgent necessity, and it is of little use to suggest co-operation in forms which the political conditions of the time will not permit.

When the Imperial Cabinet meet next June, they will find themselves confronted in one form or another with a number of questions requiring immediate action. The difficulty is that public opinion is quite unformed in some or all of the countries which the various members of the Imperial Cabinet represent. Too little thought will have been given to these matters before the Cabinet meets. No adequate discussion will have taken place in the Press, and as a rule no attempt will have been made to discuss them in the legislatures.

Ministers cannot say that the electorate or legislature they represent thinks this or that, because in their hearts they know that no genuine public opinion on the subject exists. A vast deal can be done to remedy this paralysing state of affairs by a few men who have taken the trouble to see what the questions demanding solution are, to gather information, and to formulate answers for themselves. So

equipped, the groups will have no difficulty in raising discussions in the Press, in forcing Parliaments to consider these questions, and in supplying the material for forming public opinion. The opportunities for public service which are open to the groups in this direction are unlimited.

This can now scarcely be done in time for the next Imperial Cabinet, but just because public opinion is imperfectly formed, we are not sanguine that the meeting of 1921 will be fruitful of decisions. It would not surprise us in the least if this next Imperial Cabinet should decide that the time is not yet ripe either to fix the date or the composition of the future Imperial Conference. Constructional measures cannot proceed faster than the formation of public opinion. Educational work done by student organisations like the Round Table groups will largely determine how far questions vitally affecting the national aspirations of the Dominions can be brought to decision. At the risk of iteration we would urge once more that it is only by bringing such national questions to a decision that real light can now be thrown on the Imperial problem.

#### *7. The Ultimate Issue.*

The consideration of national policy and of the immediate needs of Imperial co-operation will lead inevitably to the ultimate issue between national development and Imperial union. We think that two considerations will be found of cardinal importance in any real study of this ultimate problem.

First, as to the theory of nationality. Nothing is the subject of greater confusion of thought in the speaking and writing of the present day. We would beg the groups to analyse most faithfully the current phrases on the subject, such as "self-determination," and to arrive, if they can, at some clear concept of what it is that makes a nation. If democratic development really requires that sovereignty should be coterminous with nationality in many of the common acceptations of that term, the world is on the eve of protracted war, disruption and anarchy. On the other hand, the growth of liberty under law has manifestly benefited by the formation of large units of government, and it is clear that many intensely proud and individual nationalities, such as the English, the Scottish and the

Welsh, have combined in one sovereign State not only without prejudice, but even with advantage, to their distinctive genius and character. The groups which have not already come across it will find excellent material for judgment on this subject in Professor Zimmern's collection of essays entitled "Nationality and Government."\* There is nothing more necessary in the world at the present time than clear thinking on this subject; and it is at the root of the constitutional problem of the British Empire.

In the second place, it is vain to study national development without taking into account the changes in the distribution of material power which are taking place in the world. In the British Empire power is passing to the younger Dominions, and the future must be in their hands. It is idle to discuss the ultimate national development of any Dominion without reference to this factor, for the time is passing, if it has not already passed, when the main fabric of the Empire can be sustained by the British Isles alone. It can be sustained only by the united action of the British peoples. If their national development makes this united action impracticable, they must look to working out their aspirations as independent sovereign Powers amid the ruins of the British Commonwealth.

We will not dwell upon the moral and spiritual side of the Imperial argument, because it is already familiar to all Round Table groups, and we do not doubt that it will carry full weight in any fresh studies which they may undertake. But that argument was never more cogent than in the welter of national ambitions bequeathed us by the war. For more than a century the main causes of international enmity and unrest have belonged to one or other of two great forces—on the one hand, the expanding force of nationality; on the other, the force which compels the exploitation of less civilised peoples and undeveloped areas in the pursuit of wealth and power. Amongst the greater nations these two forces have invariably combined. It has been the sovereign and peculiar virtue of the British Empire hitherto to harmonise different forms of national sentiment in free and willing subordination to a common ideal of law and government, and to substitute orderly development for war and exploitation in half the backward areas of the world. If the British Empire fell to-morrow, it would leave a

\* *Nationality and Government, with other War-Time Essays*, by Alfred E. Zimmern. Chatto and Windus, 1918.

mighty memory which the broken world would strive in due time from sheer necessity to revive and restore. The Empire has, in fact, never been more needed or more powerful than to-day, but a period of searching trial is already upon it from within and without, and the supreme test will come from the tremendous forces of nationalism in the hearts of its own peoples, east and west. Can it reconcile and harmonise those splendid forces in the service of a common ideal of freedom under law transcending the lesser freedoms to which untutored democracy reaches blindly as the supreme and final good? The future of international peace and order hangs upon the test; and if indeed the flowering of the younger British nations be incompatible with their union in a single Commonwealth, the League of Nations must prove as distant an ideal in this twentieth century of grace as mankind's first glimmering desire for social order in the Age of Stone or Brass.

LONDON,

*January, 1921.*









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