



Empire Citizenship

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EMPIRE CITIZENSHIP

By the Hon. T. R. BAVIN, K.C.,
Premier of New South Wales

When an Australian leaves his country for the first time to visit Great Britain and other Dominions, the fact that strikes him with a new significance is that Australia is part of a great Empire, and he himself a citizen of it.

London, the heart of the Empire, whose very stones are instinct with history, reminds him, as no other city in the world can do, of a heritage which he shares, and of traditions which still mould and govern the life of the British race in whatever quarter of the globe it is found.

He finds among British public men of every party, a keen interest in and knowledge of Empire problems, and it gradually begins to dawn on him that perhaps they are even more alive to the significance of those problems than the Dominions themselves. It is brought home to him as never before that he is more than an Australian—he is a Britisher, and more than a Britisher, for he is a citizen of the Empire, and he gets a more vivid conception of the fact that such citizenship carries with it obligations as well as privileges.

This is well, for there is a temptation in Australia and in some of the other Dominions to regard Empire citizenship and the duties associated with it as being largely discharged by word, by singing, "God Save the King," talking eloquently about the Union Jack or engaging in the occupation known as flag-wagging. But membership of the Empire means more than pride in its achievements and prestige, more than a complacent acceptance of its rights and privileges. It means also obligations which

Empire Citizenship

have to be shouldered. These obligations not only make heavy demands on intelligence and patriotism, but call also on each citizen of the Empire to make a positive contribution to its development, and unless that contribution is made we are not realizing citizenship to its fullest extent.

The duties of citizenship in these days are both complicated and exacting. First we are citizens of a city. We cannot afford to neglect our obligations in that capacity, for the city touches our every day life and interests at many points, and it is natural, therefore, that we should realize more vividly these closer contacts and the obligations such citizenship implies. Secondly, we are citizens of a State and have to solve domestic problems, such as the development of our resources, internal transport, education, the preservation of public order and private rights. All these things touch our daily lives directly and obviously and the efficiency with which they are accomplished depends on our discharge of our duties as citizens of that State.

Thirdly, we have our Federal citizenship, which deals with a different range of interests which are none the less important because they do not touch our lives so directly and obviously. This field covers external affairs such as tariff policy, overseas trade, defence and all matters which are common to us as citizens of the Commonwealth. Our national policy depends to a large extent on the intelligence, wisdom and patriotism of our elected legislators and as a rule their intelligence does not rise higher than that of the constituency they represent. Finally comes citizenship of the British Empire, which is, in a sense, higher than all the rest, though its duties have not been defined with the same precision and clearness as those of City, State and Dominion, since each of these institutions represents a well established form of union brought into existence for certain well-defined purposes. But the British Empire, as it exists to-day, is like no other form of political association of which history has any record. It is the greatest experiment ever made in human organization, and is still in the experimental stage. It is an effort to unite in a common world purpose, communities

Empire Citizenship

widely separated by distance, religion, language, colour, history and tradition. It embodies the two apparently opposing ideas of complete internal autonomy and a single policy in relation to the outside world.

Unfortunately, however, the relationship of the Empire is sometimes conceived in a negative way, as being the barren right to do as we like, and realize our local aspirations independently, regardless of the repercussions of this policy on other Dominions, and of doing this under the protection and prestige attaching to Empire membership. This idea of Empire robs it of any real meaning and destroys any real unity. If Empire citizenship means anything it implies an active and intelligent co-operation on the part of the Dominions, and of the people of the Dominions, in a positive policy—common to the whole Empire—in world affairs, and also in those affairs which concern us all as members of the Empire. It involves the recognition that it is impossible for Great Britain to go on carrying as large a share of the burden as she has hitherto done, and that the Dominions must bear more of the burdens of Empire organization and defence. The main cause for Great Britain's inability to go on doing this is the effort she made in the Great War not only for herself, but for Australia and the whole world. During that time, an enormous amount of her capital wealth was destroyed, and since it was derived not so much from internal resources as from supplying goods and services to the rest of the world, she is now faced with difficulty in replacing it. Since the war, not only has the purchasing power of her customers been considerably diminished, but in many cases during the dislocation of trade brought about by hostilities, these customers learned to build up their own resources and manufactures. Britain's wealth has been seriously impaired, and it is the business of the Dominions to face this fact and all it implies.

Again the conception of Empire citizenship implies the necessity for defining what are our common purposes, and the area of activity in which the Empire should act as a

Empire Citizenship

unit, and what is the best machinery for making this common action possible and effective.

One of the directions in which there is clearly room for a common policy is in the direction of achieving a better distribution of population. While Great Britain is finding difficulty in providing for her surplus population, there are portions of the Empire suffering from scarcity of population. This alone is a problem of overwhelming difficulty, and allied to it is the further problem of the fuller development of Empire resources and the freer interchange of Empire products. One of the consequences of the intensification of national feeling brought about by the war, has been a widespread movement towards protection, and as a result of this, the avenues of trade for members of the British Empire, other than within the Empire itself, are being gradually closed. In Australia the necessity for putting more men on the land is continually being stressed. But it is evident that it is impossible to settle anybody on the land, or increase our population, or take the number of migrants we should be taking from Great Britain, unless we make it possible for the people we put on the land to add to our products, to sell those products at a profit. The problem of marketing Empire products, and particularly Australian products, is becoming more and more acute.

Another problem common to all the nations of the Empire, is the necessity for a more efficient defence system, and a more equitable division of the responsibility and cost. The Dominions are not bearing their full share at present, although Australia is doing so to a greater extent than the others, for we have a policy of definite co-operation with the British Empire in naval defence and can fairly say that we are trying to recognise this part at least of our obligations of Empire citizenship.

If the Empire is to exist it is essential that there should be effective machinery to make consultation and discussion easy and continuous among the Dominions, especially in relation to foreign affairs. Enormous as are the geographical difficulties in the way of such consultation,

Empire Citizenship

they are gradually being diminished by modern science, and no doubt before long we shall evolve a system which will enable all parts of the Empire to take a full part in Empire discussions, and make a full contribution to real and positive Empire policy.

These, then, are some of the problems to which those who value Empire citizenship should address themselves. The solution is worth attempting, for the existence of the Empire is of paramount importance to all the Dominions, to none more so than to Australia. Not only is membership of the British Empire consistent with the fullest realization of our national aspirations, but Australia obviously can lead a far fuller, richer, and more dignified life within the Empire than outside its boundaries. The British Empire is well worth preserving. It is not merely a great aggregation of human beings possessing illimitable wealth, and mighty naval and military power, but it is also a great spiritual partnership. It is the greatest single force in the world to-day making for peace, liberty, tolerance and justice, and the ordered government of man, and it can only endure so long as its policy is based not only on the material advantages of its members, but on these great British ideals.