

3. MEETING OF FOREIGN MINISTERS (CEYLON, JANUARY, 1950)

This was the first occasion on which Commonwealth Foreign Ministers had come together for the purpose of exchanging views and information on foreign policy. Although agreed decisions were neither sought nor expected, the Conference exhibited a remarkable community of feeling and outlook. This spirit, which showed up against a background of great friendliness and understanding, showed that recent constitutional developments have in no way weakened the ties of common tradition and interest that bind the countries of the British Commonwealth together.

Although close attention was given to the general world situation, the greater part of the Conference was devoted to discussions on problems arising in South-east Asia and the Far East. Among these were the relations between Commonwealth countries and China, the struggle in Indo-China, the Japanese peace settlement, and the situation in Burma and Malaya.

After reviewing the general situation in South and South-east Asia, the Conference was impressed with the urgent necessity of raising standards of living in these areas. It accordingly recommended the adoption of a plan for economic development of the under-developed countries of South and South-east Asia. This plan, which was based on proposals put forward jointly by the representatives of Ceylon and Australia, provided for the setting-up of a Commonwealth Consultative Committee to hold its first meeting in Australia in May, 1950. The Committee was to draw up plans for prompt help designed to raise living standards in these countries by way of technical and possibly financial and other kinds of assistance, as well as a plan for long-term development of the area.

The New Zealand delegate, the Hon. F. W. Doidge, in expressing his approval of the Colombo Plan, made it clear that New Zealand, while giving strong support to the proposals for economic development in South and South-east Asia, would, for financial and other reasons, have to confine any contribution to technical assistance. He believed, however, that New Zealand would be able to play a worthy part by this means.

The recommendations of the Conference relating to the establishment of a Commonwealth Consultative Committee on economic development in South and South-east Asia, and also of a working party on the Japanese peace settlement to meet in London in May, were approved by the Government.

On his return journey from Colombo the Minister of External Affairs conferred in Singapore with the United Kingdom Commissioner-General for South-east Asia, the Right Hon. Malcolm