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NEW ZEALAND.

## MAJOR-GENERAL FRENCH'S DEFENCE SCHEME.

(AUSTRALIA'S MOUNTED MEN.)

*Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave.*

Major-General FRENCH to the Right Hon. the PREMIER.

SIR,—

Sydney, 8th May, 1900.

The present war in South Africa has demonstrated the fact that the defence of the British Empire in the future is not a question to be left wholly to the people of the British Isles, but that the English-speaking people throughout the Empire are willing to take their share in its defence, and provide the men, and possibly the money, therefor.

Having had an experience of a dozen years in Canada and a similar amount in Australia, mostly with colonial forces, I would like to make two points clear: (1) It is idle to hope or expect that any large force of Imperial troops, paid at Imperial rates, could be raised in these colonies for ordinary garrison work or duties in peace time. (2) It is equally certain that thousands of men can be raised in war time, who will engage for the war at a fair rate of pay.

With regard to the first point, I may mention that the minimum rate of wages for labourers on Government contracts has been fixed at 7s. per diem in this colony, and it is pretty much the same in the other Australian colonies. This will give some idea of the futility of attempting to carry out this matter.

The second point is one of the greatest possible importance to my mind. Few who have not resided in these colonies during the past six months could realise the intense enthusiasm and desire amongst all classes to take part in the war; this colony has sent some 2,700 officers and men, and as many horses, and the difficulty was not in finding the men, but in having to send away the thousands who could not be taken on. The other Australian colonies had a similar experience. At the present moment some 300 infantry that have been kept in reserve here have offered their services at the Imperial rates of pay rather than not go at all!

The real way, in my opinion, to help Old England to keep the flag flying all over the Empire is to form war reserves in the colonies. In doing so the specialities of the colonies should be borne in mind. Thus Canada, with her 75,000 sailors and fishermen on the Atlantic seaboard, should provide a large war reserve for the fleet, and probably would do so if the Admiralty, instead of framing cast-iron regulations suitable for Great Britain, would appreciate the fact that the most suitable time to carry out the training of these fishermen would be the time of year when they could not carry on their usual avocations.

Australia, on the other hand, could do little as a war reserve for the navy, but much for the land forces of all arms, but especially the mounted services. I have little hesitation in saying that the finest material for the light

cavalry of the Empire is to be found in these colonies, where the ordinary daily work of the bushman is a constant rehearsal of the work of the cavalry scout. We have sent some 3,500 mounted bushmen to South Africa. There was little time for training or for selection of officers or N.C. officers; but, nevertheless, I am certain that these men will give a good account of themselves. But how much better if they had been trained, and properly equipped!

Now, my scheme, as far as Australia is concerned, is as follows:—

- (a.) A war reserve of, say, 10,000 men, largely mounted men.
- (b.) This reserve to be formed mainly from efficient officers and men who have passed through the ranks of the defence forces, and who agree to serve within or without Australia in war time. The 6,000 men now in South Africa would give this reserve a good start.
- (c.) Rates of pay on active service as for the permanent forces of Australia.
- (d.) A retaining-fee, or reserve pay, of £8 per annum for efficient privates of infantry, £12 per annum for troopers of mounted corps who have horses and saddlery fit for service, other ranks in proportion.
- (e.) The requirements for efficiency to involve an annual course of training and musketry.
- (f.) The reserve pay and pay on active service to be paid by the Imperial Government.

The approximate comparative cost of 10,000 Australian reserves at £10 per annum would be £100,000; whereas the cost of 10,000 regular British troops at an average of £100 per annum would be £1,000,000. As regards the pay on active service, the colonial Governments are now paying the difference between the Imperial and the colonial rates to their men in South Africa. They might well do so in the future in view of the substantial advantage of having 10,000 trained reserves kept up in Australia in peace time at no expense to them.

I may explain that my main reason for asking the publication of these suggestions is with the view of obtaining expressions of opinion from those interested in the defence of the Empire as a whole, and whose opinions carry weight. I had something to do from the military side in framing the Queensland Defence Act in 1884 when Commandant there. In 1894, when serving in India, I had the satisfaction of reading that at a meeting of the Australian commandants it was resolved that a Defence Act for all Australia should be prepared and based on the Queensland Act. I have now been asked to prepare such an Act, and it can readily be imagined what an immense advantage it would be if in the Federal Defence Act for all Australia, which must soon be brought forward, the necessary powers could be taken for the formation of a war reserve of the nature above indicated.

An experience of a quarter of a century in the colonies forces me to the conclusion that such a scheme, if feasible, would be mutually advantageous for the colonies and England, and beneficial to the grand Empire in which we live, and for which we ought to do our utmost.

Now is the time to act. If we wait till the cold fit comes on progress may be made impossible.

I am, &c.,

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Major-General Commandant New South  
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