

"Mr. Massey: They are going on.

"Mr. Balfour: Not yet. This question has only been taken in hand quite recently. Therefore, until Singapore is rendered the place which we think it ought to be made—a place of concentration, a place of refitting and refuelling—until this is done, we are at a relative disadvantage undoubtedly in the Pacific, and that is a very strong strategical reason, putting all wider considerations apart, why we should remain on the most friendly terms with Japan, and why we should continue a policy we have hitherto pursued with such success, that is, of joint action with Japan in the Far East."

6. It should be noted that Mr. Balfour did not suggest that a renewal of the Alliance with Japan would render it unnecessary to proceed with the base at Singapore, although, in an earlier passage, he had recalled that in the past "the fact of the Japanese Alliance was held to relieve the Admiralty of the day of any serious responsibility in regard to the Pacific." On the contrary, he pointed out to the Conference that the substitution of oil for coal for fuel for battleships had rendered it absolutely necessary to create a base at Singapore as an indispensable condition of action by the Fleet in the Far East.

7. The question of Singapore was discussed in greater detail at the Imperial Conference at the meetings devoted to Naval Defence, the record of which, owing to its secrecy, was limited by the Conference itself to a single copy. In those discussions Lord Lee said (E-14th Meeting):—

"The Home Government have therefore come to the decision that Singapore must be developed as the main base for the British Fleet in the Pacific."

Later on, in the same statement, Lord Lee made it quite clear that the proposals of the Admiralty were unaffected by the question of the renewal or otherwise of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, except that if the Alliance were dropped and Japan became hostile, "then undoubtedly there would be increased urgency for the development and establishment of our bases in the Pacific and our oil reserves."

8. After the preliminary discussion, further conversations took place at the Admiralty with the representatives of the Dominions, and the Admiralty, on the 11th July, circulated a summary of their recommendations (E-32). This included the following:—

"In the Admiralty opinion, Australia, New Zealand and India should be asked to contribute a considerable portion of the expenditure necessary to develop Singapore as a Fleet base, since they are intimately concerned therein."

9. On the 11th July the British Government accepted the invitation to the Washington Conference. It was already clear that a Pacific agreement would be one of our objects at the Conference, for a statement to this effect was included in the announcement made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Lloyd George) in the House of Commons on the 11th July as representing the opinion of all the members of the Conference on the question of the Pacific and also on the question of disarmament.

10. The subject of Naval Defence was again taken up by the full Conference on the 19th July (E-26th Meeting), when Lord Lee again emphasised the importance of Singapore. This statement, it should be noted, was made a week after the announcement referred to above that a Pacific agreement was part of our policy for the Washington Conference. The records of this meeting of the Conference contain no suggestion that the development of Singapore as a naval base should be postponed if a Pacific agreement was achieved.

11. It is quite true, as mentioned in General Smuts' Minute, that the following resolution was passed by the Conference in regard to the naval defence of the Empire:—

"That, while recognising the necessity of co-operation among the various portions of the Empire to provide such naval defence as may prove to be essential for security, and while holding that equality with the naval strength of any other Power is a minimum standard for that purpose, this Conference is of opinion that the method and expense of such co-operation are matters for the full determination of the several Parliaments concerned, and that any recommendations thereon should be deferred until after the coming Conference on Disarmament."

12. The policy set forth in this resolution is that equality with the naval strength of any Power is a minimum standard for the British Empire. It was not the policy, but the method and expense of co-operation among the various portions of the Empire which, by this resolution, was deferred until after the Washington Conference. So long as the British Fleet is entirely unable to operate in the Pacific, it cannot be considered that a one-Power standard is being maintained. In these circumstances, His Majesty's Government felt that the development of the Naval base at Singapore was a matter which should not be further delayed, and they had no reason to believe that any Dominion held a contrary view.

13. The instructions of the British Government to Mr. Balfour and his colleagues for the Washington Conference are contained in a Memorandum drawn up as the result of an enquiry by the Standing Defence Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Balfour. These instructions, which were fully discussed and approved by the Cabinet include the following in the summary of Conclusions:—

"Singapore.

"That no agreement should be reached at the Conference which will in any way interfere with the development of Singapore as a British Naval Base, since such development is purely defensive in character and is already overdue."

14. At the outset of the Conference, Mr. Balfour at an informal meeting gave the British Empire Delegation full particulars as to his instructions and the lines on which he proposed to proceed. It is practically certain that he must have mentioned the decision in regard to Singapore, though no record was kept of what he said. In any event, there is no possible room for doubt that all members of the British Empire Delegation knew what was our policy in regard to Singapore. For example, at a meeting of the British Empire Delegation on the 2nd December, 1921, when the proposal for a limitation in regard to fortifications and naval bases in the Pacific was under discussion, Senator Pearce, the Australian Representative, pointed out the desirability of Singapore being left out of any restricted arrangement as to the construction of fortifications and naval bases in the Pacific, and Mr. Balfour remarked that in none of the conversations he had so far had was the question of Singapore raised, and he preferred to leave it alone.

Again, the question of Singapore was constantly referred to in the telegrams which passed between Mr. Balfour and the Home Government, copies of all of which were circulated to all members of the British Empire Delegation. Thus, a telegram dated the 18th December, from Lord Curzon, included the following:—

"With regard to fortifications in the Pacific, you say Singapore is not mentioned. We presume by this that we are free to develop Singapore as a first-class naval base if we think it necessary to do so. This we regard as indispensable, and we hope you will make sure there is no misunderstanding with the Americans and still more the Japanese on this point. As you are aware from discussions over which you have presided in the Committee of Imperial Defence, the defence of Australia and New Zealand might in certain circumstances depend entirely on Singapore."

On the 13th January, Mr. Churchill, who was acting as Chairman of the Standing Defence Sub-Committee in Mr. Balfour's absence, sent the following telegram:—

"With reference to your telegram No. 166 of the 15th December and the provision in the 3-Power Agreement on the Naval Ratio that the *status quo* shall be maintained with respect to fortifications and naval bases in the Pacific region, including Hong Kong, it is presumed that our freedom of action in regard to Singapore has been preserved."

15. So far as can be traced, Singapore was only once alluded to in the course of the conversations at Washington. A telegram, dated the 24th January, from Mr. Balfour, includes the following:—

"I introduced certain amendments to place beyond doubt the exclusion of Singapore (in which Baron Kato acquiesced) as well as territories of Australia, according to a formula designed by Senator Pearce; also to limit the *status quo* in fortifications and coast defences. I have since discussed draft with Mr. Hughes, who tells me that American Delegation have accepted all my amendments. During this conversation, Mr. Hughes volunteered the observation that of course Singapore was excluded as it was neither island nor in Pacific."

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