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SEDDON'S CONTRIBUTION TO IMPERIAL RELATIONS

1897 TO 1902

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By

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This essay is not an attempt to give all Seddon's relations with the Imperial authorities in the period; it is rather an analysis of the importance of his and New Zealand's contributions to imperial relations. I have deliberately concentrated on his participation in the two Colonial Conferences because of the importance of his actions for both the national future of New Zealand and the future of the Empire. At the same time, I realise the danger of divorcing this topic from its historical context. Because he dominated policy decision making in New Zealand from 1899 to 1902 I have concentrated more on his personal decisions in this later period. Seddon's "foreign policy" and New Zealand's external relations were virtually one and the same in this middle part of his premiership. The main source material in this essay has been found in the Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives and in the microfilm of the New Zealand series of official papers of the Colonial Office. Although these sources have proven adequate in giving an official view of Seddon's relations with the Colonial Office they have not helped in analysing his motives and aims. Seddon kept no diary but his unnumerable speeches dominate the Parliamentary Debates and show the flexibility of his thinking on imperial issues.
INTRODUCTION

Richard John Seddon was sworn in as Premier of New Zealand on May 1, 1893. Although he had been a Minister of the Crown in the Ballance Government he had not taken any real interest in imperial issues. In fact, reports of his speeches from 1879 to 1891 contain no trace of the great imperialistic sentiments he expressed in later years.

The early years of his Premiership were devoted almost entirely to implementing the programme of social legislation that had been outlined by Ballance. He had served willingly under Ballance for whom he felt deep affection and respect. He had shown himself to be a shrewd politician and an adept parliamentarian.

Although it was suggested that he had seized power his leadership of the Liberal-Labour parties in New Zealand was never challenged. He inherited a united party with a programme of reform in domestic matters that was to occupy the House and the country for the next three years. The humanitarian ideals of the party and the laws enacted in this period made New Zealand the "shop-window" of liberal reform. The rush of legislation and internal reform fully occupied the minds of New Zealanders in the first six years of the 90's. But when his earlier colleagues passed from the scene they were generally replaced by men of less calibre. With the transfer of William Pember
Reeves to London in 1896 Seddon lost his chief supplier of ideas for reform. The years 1896 and 1897 were to prove his most difficult. There were no new reforms to occupy the voters' time and he was not yet popular enough to be certain of his position. But the Boer War revived the flagging enthusiasm of his party and supporters and transformed the enthusiasm for social reform into a personal enthusiasm for Seddon himself.

There was a magnetic attraction about his personality, his ceaseless energy, his force and his courage. His success was due to an unquenchable thirst for power coupled with an enormous capacity for work. Above all he was virtually faultless at interpreting public opinion. He represented New Zealand overseas in such a way as to give his people a sense of importance. He played the roles of humanitarian, socialist, imperialist and colonialis to varying degrees and as the occasion suited.

Although he was criticised by the Colonial Office for his aspirations in the Pacific he was generally more successful in his dealings with that department than any of his predecessors. Seddon was aided in his dealings with the Colonial Office by the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary on 1 July, 1895. The movement for imperial federation which had its roots in the late 1860's and early 70's and had been advocated by many individuals and groups in England and
the colonies now became a practical possibility.
In England, the idea of an "imperial council" was first advocated by the Imperial Federation League.
This body together with its offshoots the Imperial Federation (Defence) Committee and the British Empire League advocated the founding of an "imperial council" with advisory and some executive functions. 2
Chamberlain had pledged his faith in imperial federation and was committed to a policy of integrating the self governing colonies on an equal footing with Great Britain. The ideals and schemes of the "imperialist federationists" could now be tested in practice.

To the Australian and Canadian representatives at the Conferences, Seddon appeared to be careless of his country's independence and autonomy. As we shall see, many of his projects for closer imperial relations were blocked by these two countries. The situation at the Conferences became New Zealand and England pushing for closer union while Canada and Australia tried to preserve the status quo.

Imperialism was not a new phenomenon in New Zealand. In Seddon's attempts to gain annexations in the Pacific he was following the thinking of Sir George Grey, Sir Julius Vogel and Sir Robert Stout, all of whom had thought in terms of New Zealand becoming the centre of an island empire in the Pacific. 3
But more than any other Premier in this history of the Colony, Seddon was a national leader. He claimed to know what the people wanted and he interpreted the firm attachment of most New Zealanders to England to be an indication of a desire for closer relations. At the same time, he appreciated the individuality of "God's own Country", and was not prepared to sacrifice its autonomy. If New Zealand could benefit from closer relations with the Empire he was prepared to push for some form of union.
SEDDON'S 1897 VISIT

On 1 July, 1895, Joseph Chamberlain assumed office as Colonial Secretary. In speeches he made soon after assuming office he called upon the members of the Empire to cultivate imperial sentiment by improving communications, developing commercial relations and co-operating in defence. He thought union could be best brought about through the establishment of an Imperial Zollverein or commercial union. If interest was shown in closer commercial ties then a representative Imperial Council with legislative and executive functions could be established.

The Diamond Jubilee of 1897 gave Chamberlain his first real chance to bring about closer union between the Imperial Government and representatives of the self-governing colonies. Invitations were sent out at the end of January to the Premiers to attend the Jubilee celebrations and informal "discussions on many questions of the greatest Imperial interest". A telegram to this effect was received by the Governor in New Zealand on 27 January, 1897.

New Zealanders had given little thought to the problems of imperial relations but they proudly thought of themselves as being the most loyal of the Mother Country's colonies. For many reasons Seddon hesitated before he decided to accept the invitation. He had just spent over
a month in Australia at a Premiers' Conference which had decided that it would not be possible to accept Chamberlain's invitation collectively. Another absence from the country might weaken his position and his popularity was not yet great enough for him to be able to afford this. The trend of public opinion had first to be gauged. With the loss of Ward and Reeves his side was weak in debate in the house. The Earl of Glasgow saw this clearly and commented on it in a despatch to Chamberlain. "The composition of the General Assembly on the whole is superior to that of the last one. The Government side, however, has not improved in debating power, besides the Hon. J. Mackenzie (sic) and Mr Cadman, Mr Seddon has no colleagues of weight in the House". 5

In view of these difficulties Seddon was unwilling to leave the country unless the Opposition would consent to the session being postponed until his return. Although there was some disagreement as to the content of correspondence between Seddon and Russell a postponement was agreed to. At a special session of Parliament in April Seddon experienced difficulties in getting parliamentary approval. All of the members of the House were in favour of New Zealand being represented at the Jubilee celebrations but some, like Sir Robert Stout, did not want the Premier to attend a conference uninstructed by Parliament. Stout thought that close federation was years away and that the Conference would be injurious to the existence of the
Empire as a whole. In the long involved debate on 8 April, others gave different reasons for their reservations. Mr George Hutchison thought that the conferences were "more likely to lead to complications than anything else". 7 William Massey said that if Imperial questions were to be considered New Zealand should be represented by men best qualified to look at the questions from other than a party point of view. 8 Most of the opposition thought that the domestic affairs of the colony were more important than representation at a conference which might provide little for New Zealand. But the difficulties were soon overcome and the motion passed the House without a division. On 15 April, Seddon and his wife and two daughters left the shores of the colony.

Seddon planned his trip itinerary so that he could gain personal knowledge of the Pacific and America. He took part in discussions in both Samoa and Hawaii. In the United States he had an interview with President McKinley in which he was told that the Hawaiian islands were soon to be American. In Canada he met the Governor-General, Lord Aberdeen, and subsequently the Canadian Premier, Sir Wilfred Laurier.

Seddon disembarked at Liverpool at the end of May. Once in London his life became a whirl of functions, meetings, entertainments, speeches and the inevitable banquets. Even his inexhaustible capacity for good food
and wine must have been extended. At most of these entertainments he was asked to speak and although New Zealanders had warned him against making long speeches when in England he did not heed their advice.

Before the Imperial Conference opened, Seddon had forcefully stated his views on all the important topics that were to be discussed. At a time when colonial nationalism was feared, his ringing imperialism not only made imperial federation seem a possibility but also delighted the British public. He announced to one audience that in the hour of peril England would find the colonies rallying round the flag.

Seddon received many honours the two most notable being a Privy Councillorship and an L.L. D. conferred upon him by the University of Cambridge. He was received by Queen Victoria, had an interview with Gladstone at Hawarden and was visited by Sir George Grey.

After the Jubilee celebrations had been completed the Conference opened on 24 July. At the first of the five sessions an agenda was agreed to and a Chairman appointed. In spite of Chamberlain's wish for an "informal discussion" the proceedings were formal with resolutions being framed and voted upon.
The Conference marked the first time that the possibility of federation could become reality. But the hopes of those that wanted closer union through the reorganisation of the Imperial structure were quickly squashed. In his opening speech Chamberlain suggested that "a great council of the Empire" should be set-up comprising delegates of the self-governing colonies and England. But only Seddon and Edward Braddon of Tasmania dissented from the resolution which stated that the "...present political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing colonies are generally satisfactory under the existing condition of things." 10

Seddon was horrified that nothing had been done to more firmly secure the political ties between the United Kingdom and the colonies. Although he urged the Premiers to adopt the Imperial Council proposal he does not seem to have had any clear idea of what such a Council might involve and when questioned for details as to the structure of it he was at a loss. "He thought there was a need for the colonial governments to be represented in England but he did not want this representation to be binding on the New Zealand government. This would have been unpopular in the colony. Nevertheless, he continued to think that a council would give New Zealand greater weight."
In his opening speech Chamberlain announced that, if unanimously recommended by the Premiers, Britain was prepared to denounce her trade treaties with Germany and Belgium. A resolution to this effect was passed but when Chamberlain asked if New Zealand was prepared to give Britain a trade preference Seddon was unwilling to commit himself, although he stated that a shipping subsidy would be more effective in promoting inter-empire trade. To Seddon's mind, New Zealand would gain more by a subsidy on shipping rates than by reducing her import duties. His decision was influenced by discussions on the lowering of freight rates he had had with all the British shipping companies trading with New Zealand. He agreed to confer with his colleagues about the prospect of giving England products preference. In the field of commercial relations he placed New Zealand interests first and made no concessions.

The Conference was addressed on the topic of naval defence by the First Lord of the Admiralty who stressed the importance of the strategic theory of concentrated forces. At the same time, he guaranteed the security of Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania. Seddon had originally wanted more ships in New Zealand waters but this guarantee satisfied him and he voted for a resolution favouring the continuance of the Australian squadron under the terms of the existing agreement.
During discussion of the future attitude to the Pacific islands Seddon urged for further annexations especially in the Soloman Islands and the New Hebrides. He pointed out that French, German and American interests in the Pacific were threatening those of Britain. But his arguments were weakened because of his failure to increase New Zealand's contribution to the Australian Squadron. Chamberlain was not prepared to jeopardise British relations with major powers in an attempt to gain more territory in the Pacific.

While promoting the Imperial Council to his fellow Premiers, Seddon had referred to the benefits resulting from the interchange of ideas at the Conference. He thought it would be unfortunate if such meetings stopped. At the end of the Conference, Chamberlain referred to these remarks and suggested that periodical conferences be held. Discussion that followed resulted in the unanimous passing of a resolution to the effect that "it would be desirable to hold periodical conferences of representatives of the Colonies and Great Britain for the discussion of matters of common interest". This resolution left the way open for further meetings on imperial affairs and it gave great satisfaction to Seddon and Chamberlain.

From all this evidence it can be seen that Seddon was the most aggressive imperialist at the Conference. His contribution, however, was limited by the vast majority of delegates who thought that the
existing political relations within the Empire were satisfactory. It was further limited by his unwillingness to sacrifice his government's power to a Colonial delegate in England. Many of his actions and statements, especially those made outside the Conference, show that at this stage he did not appreciate the implications of his broad imperialist policies.

Up until the time of the 1897 Conference all his tremendous energy had been confined to internal reform and events directly related to the national interest. These facts together with his preoccupation with social reform led to a dependence on the Imperial Government and helped to usher in the "mother complex" which became so dominant in New Zealand's relations with England. After this Conference, Seddon thought that closer union between "Home" and the colony would give New Zealand a greater opportunity of influencing Imperial policy. Instead of adopting a more independent nationalist policy he clung to Britain. Although his impact at the Conference may have been limited, through his personality New Zealand came to be known in the eyes of the British public, as the most loyal Colony.
One serious problem that faced Seddon throughout this period was whether or not New Zealand should enter the proposed federation of Australasian states. New Zealand's decision to remain outside the Commonwealth was the result of many different influences, the chief one being a feeling of intense loyalty to the Mother Country.

During the federation discussions in Australia in the 1890's, New Zealand had been considered a possible potential member of a federation. In the middle of the controversy Seddon called a Conference of Australasian Premiers to discuss closer commercial relations with Britain and inter-colonial trade reciprocity. The Conference achieved little but it gave Seddon an opportunity to travel throughout Australia during February and early March of 1897.

Seddon's indecision and indifference to the schemes of Australian federation can be attributed to the apathetic attitude with which the New Zealand public reviewed the prospect. He did not want to commit himself until he could determine the opinion of the public. Although in August 1899, the plan for federation was accepted by the various Australian states there was no immediate reaction in New Zealand. On the other hand, distrust of Australia and the fear of being absorbed by her had long been traditional.
The outbreak of the Boer War aroused colonial patriotism and determined the national destiny of New Zealand. It made it possible for politicians to keep the question of federation out of the 1899 election. In the House in October, Seddon said that federation was not a party issue and should not be allowed to disturb the elections. He could see no harm in taking time to decide terms. The question did not become an election issue. The overwhelming victory of the Liberals was due in no small part to this exploitation of jingoism which had enabled him to keep the federation question in the background.

If the Colony joined the Commonwealth Seddon would have damaged his own personal standing. No doubt he regarded his position as Premier of a self-governing colony as superior to being the head of a member state of the Australian Commonwealth. But the victory at the polls meant he could no longer hesitate. Towards the end of February, 1900, when the Commonwealth Constitution was about to be ratified by the Imperial Government and the Australian delegates were already on their way to England, Seddon announced his policy. He hoped for the insertion of an "open door" clause which would enable New Zealand to subsequently enter the federation upon equal terms. If this was not possible then Reeves was to try and get special privileges of commercial reciprocity.
Another amendment concerned the right of appeal to the Privy Council. At the Conference, Reeves failed to get any of these amendments adopted. 16

The impractical character of Seddon's proposals suggest that he was still trying to discover public opinion. 17 Early in 1901, he appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the question both in New Zealand and Australia. Although it could be suggested the Commission pre-judged the issue, a unanimous decision not to join the Commonwealth was reached. The Commission considered that the Empire would be weakened by the complete federation of all the Australian colonies. As long as there was a common loyalty to the Crown the co-existence of the two Governments might serve to check hasty, independent action on the part of either. It reaffirmed the principle that naval defence was an imperial responsibility. It showed that, with the exception of some manufacturers, New Zealand was financially and economically dependent on Britain.

The report is important because it acknowledges that most New Zealanders thought there were more advantages in remaining independent within the Empire than in joining the Commonwealth. André Siegfried, who visited New Zealand in 1904, remarked that this distrust of Australia coincided with an unlimited confidence in England. He wrote:
"The fear of being absorbed by the one (Australia) naturally pushed New Zealand into the arms of the other, and in this sense we may say without paradox that the New Zealanders are morally further away from the Australians than they are from the English. To the former, they display a distrustful independence; but for the latter they reserve all their devotion, all their favours, all their gratitude". 18
RELATIONS OVER THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

New Zealand's interest in the islands of the Pacific covers the period from before she was a British colony to the death of Seddon. The idea of New Zealand having an imperial destiny of her own with an interest in Pacific issues and annexations was traditional.

Although he had taken little interest in Pacific affairs before he became Premier, Seddon tried in 1894 to get the Imperial Government to abrogate the tripartite agreement (Britain, Germany, and the United States) by which Samoa was governed, in favour of a British protectorate which the New Zealand Government would administer. His demands were viewed with sympathy by some members of the Colonial Office but finally they were dismissed. Not in the least perturbed by this he told Parliament:

"This colony was geographically the centre, and must ultimately prove to be the mother country, of the islands adjacent". 19

When Civil War erupted again in Samoa in 1899 over who was to succeed the king, Seddon offered the government steamer Tutanekai to the British Government. He also offered to send five hundred volunteers to Samoa to help restore peace and to end the unsatisfactory compromise which followed the agreement of 1889.
This offer to send troops was for New Zealand and himself a kind of debut on the stage of Empire. While martial spirit ran high in New Zealand, European statesmen were anxious to avoid war. The International Commission which was set up to investigate the Samoan question used the steamer but the offer of colonial troops was politely declined.

The final terms of the Samoan settlement were a bitter disappointment to Seddon. Britain renounced all her rights in Samoa to Germany and the United States. The incident marks the best example of Seddon's aspirations for an extension of power in the Pacific being frustrated by the wider implications of Britain's foreign policy. At this time, England was emerging from a period of isolation in Europe and saw the need for friends on the Continent. Because of her involvement in South Africa, she was not prepared to sacrifice relations with Germany and America by opposing their interests in the Pacific.

But Seddon continued to press for a forward British policy in the Pacific to make up for the loss of Samoa. In his next venture he was more successful due to a combination of many factors. New Zealand's participation in the Boer War and her contribution to the Pacific cable forced the Colonial Office to take a closer look at his demands. Since the establishment of a British protectorate over the Cook Islands in 1888, the British Resident had been a New Zealander selected and paid by the New Zealand Government.
With the appointment of Lt.-Colonel W. Gudgeon many of the earlier difficulties were overcome and rapid progress was made. Lord Ranfurly visited the group in 1899 and in a confidential despatch to Chamberlain remarked that "annexation would prove the most satisfactory solution to the problem". 21

In May, 1900, Seddon's health was in a critical state and he decided to combine leisure with business by going to the Cook Islands. 22 Throughout the visit, he was treated with great respect and at Rarotonga received a petition, signed by forty residents, asking for annexation. On his return to New Zealand, he wrote a long memorandum to the Governor, recommending the early annexation of the Cook Island and Niue. In view of the petition and Seddon's guarantees the Colonial Office was prepared to authorize the annexation of the islands to the Empire. On the 28th of September, 1900, Seddon rushed through the House a resolution to incorporate the Cook Islands within the boundaries of New Zealand. He stressed the national importance of this event:

"We are commencing a new century, and with its dawn let us commence a new life - one of expansion, and on the forward path of our ultimate destiny". 23
The annexation was greeted with enthusiasm by the newspapers throughout the colony and the implication that this was to start further expansions was looked upon with favour. It meant that Seddon's efforts had been rewarded and the quarrel with the Colonial Office had not been in vain.

From 1900 to 1902, Seddon made an unsuccessful attempt to take over the control of Fiji from the Imperial Government. In this study the attempt is only important for the light it throws on the Colonial Office's attitude to New Zealand's designs in the Pacific and the hostile reaction in Australia. During his health cruise in May, 1900, he had visited Suva where a group of colonists had shown their willingness to support any move to affiliate Fiji to New Zealand. In October, the temporary Deputy-Governor of New Zealand, Stout, at Seddon's request telegraphed Chamberlain asking that consideration be given to federation between New Zealand and Fiji. Chamberlain replied that the Government was not prepared to alter the present political status of Fiji. He did not add his feeling that New Zealand was not fitted to govern a backward native dependency like Fiji.

Seddon responded to this by pushing resolutions for the incorporation of Fiji into New Zealand through both Houses of the General Assembly. He was anxious that New Zealand should not become over-shadowed by federated Australia. When Sir George O'Brien, the Governor of Fiji,
made an unfortunate reference to New Zealand's land policy Seddon protested to the Colonial Office. The protest and some of O'Brien's later actions led to the recall of the Governor. But the Colonial Office opposition to New Zealand annexation of Fiji continued and was reinforced by a confidential letter from Ranfurly to Chamberlain in which he said that New Zealand would not be able to govern Fiji properly. 26 After the Colonial Conference of 1902, New Zealand dropped the matter.

It can be seen that Seddon's imperial interests were wider than any of his predecessors. This was in part a reaction to Australian federation. The one consistent theme in his agitation for Britain to extend her territories was his wish to be consulted in imperial foreign policy. At times he acted as though he was a colonial office spokesman - that New Zealand and British aspirations were parallel. But he appreciated that New Zealand's traditional ties, her isolation, and her economic dependence on England made it necessary to strengthen rather than weaken the bonds of Empire.

Nevertheless, he viewed Britain's record in the Pacific with distaste and it was his "avowed intention" for the 1900 cruise to study the island territories at first hand with the hope that they might be annexed to New Zealand. He was sincere in believing it was his duty to protect the Empire's interests in the Pacific and to further the imperial destiny of New Zealand.
SEDDON'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE BOER WAR

While New Zealand resolved her own small imperialist problems she was caught up in a great imperial movement that was to have tremendous consequences. While the Boer War caused a growth of nationalism in New Zealand it also heightened devotion to the imperial connection and bred a realisation of the importance of solidarity in the Empire. By the despatch of New Zealand troops to South Africa the people of New Zealand came to identify themselves with the Imperial interests of England. What did Seddon hope to gain by sending troops? Was this just another example of New Zealand's unlimited loyalty to the Mother Country? These questions must be answered before it is possible to evaluate his actions.

Throughout 1899, Seddon watched closely developments in South Africa convinced that New Zealand was directly involved. He knew none of the arguments put forward by those who opposed war and was convinced that justice lay with England. This was a welcome opportunity for the Colony to show its loyalty to the Mother Country and most New Zealanders already identified themselves with the Uitlanders. It was not difficult to convince them that they were going to war to protect loyal British colonists.

On September, 28, he moved a resolution in the House of Representatives offering a contingent of two hundred men for service in the Transvaal.
He argued that the honour of the Empire was involved and that New Zealand must participate because she was an "integral part" of one great Empire. After giving particulars of the force and its cost Seddon appealed to the patriotism of the House.

In his right of reply it can be seen that Seddon was conscious that in leading the colony into war he was helping to earn a "direct part in the government of a federated Empire". He told the House that, "By proving ourselves worthy we shall be entrusted with increased responsibility". The resolution was seconded by the leader of the Opposition, Captain W. Russell. Although a few protests were made the motion was carried after only a brief discussion by fifty-four votes to five.

On 7 October, the Imperial Government accepted New Zealand's offer of military assistance. Seddon had gauged public opinion accurately and there were more volunteers than necessary. In all, New Zealand was to send more than 6,000 men, the highest proportion per head of population for the self-governing colonies.

In the wake of this patriotic feeling, jingoism swept the country. Seddon's speeches appealed to the public enthusiasm for war. He was continually preaching loyal slogans: "One people and one nation and one flag", "Patriotism must be our guide, Empire the goal". The enthusiasm for war gave him a landslide
victory in the 1899 elections.

Throughout the War he was intolerant of pro-Boer opinion. He responded to the sneering comments in German newspapers about the lack of colonial participation once the brutality of war became known by offering more troops. He stated that, "Additional troops would not have been required had all the statesmen and parties in the United Kingdom been guided by love of country and patriotism, reserving adverse criticism for a fitting opportunity, for their can be little doubt than unguarded speeches, writings and actions have encouraged the Boers to go on with the hopeless struggle". 32

At the same time, Seddon wanted to see New Zealand share in the spoils of war. He complained that the War Office had not sent application forms for meat contracts for the army in South Africa to New Zealand until it was so close to the specified closing time New Zealand firms could not compete for the contract. 33 He criticised the system by which large firms monopolised the supply of oats to the army. It would be wrong, however, to think that Seddon led New Zealand to war for economic gain. But he did think that her contribution of troops gave her the right to participate in any economic gains that might eventuate.

Did Seddon hope to gain personally from New Zealand's participation in the War? The rumour that he
was likely to be appointed to a Governorship in South Africa sprang from his suggestion to the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, that the New Zealand system of land settlement would be best to implement in the conquered territories. One London paper commented that if the scheme were to be put into operation then Seddon should be asked to carry it out. There is no evidence to back the rumour up and the incident is just another example of Seddon freely giving advice.

There are innumerable examples of this characteristic during Seddon's stop over in South Africa while on the way to the Colonial Conference in 1902. One speech he made in Johannesburg demanding an unconditional surrender by the Boers was censored. But in general his breezy optimism, his forthright speeches and his unlimited energy made him a popular figure with the South African public.

Seddon's desire to help the imperial cause in South Africa and his feeling of loyalty to the Empire, prompted him to take the lead in the colonial movement in support of England. This feeling was sincere and it would be wrong to argue that one of his main motives for sending troops, was to get more Imperial aid in the future. Even if this were a contributory reason, he must have been disappointed by the outcome of the Colonial Conference in 1902.
SEDDON AT THE 1902 COLONIAL CONFERENCE

On 27 December, 1901, Chamberlain invited the Premiers of the self-governing colonies to attend the Coronation ceremony of King Edward VII in 1902. On 23 January, 1902, he suggested that the opportunity should be used to discuss the political and commercial relations of the Empire and its naval and military defence. These subjects aimed at dealing with the problem of maintaining Empire solidarity and would be of primary importance in bringing about closer relations. In reply to a request for resolutions on these subjects Seddon sent seven proposals.

In 1897, Seddon had arrived in England comparatively unknown. In 1902, he arrived, preceded by a reputation for loud and convinced patriotism that had been greatly enhanced since the outbreak of the war. He attended a whirl of receptions, banquets, excursions and other amusements. He was at the zenith of his career and revelled in the publicity that was showered on him by the press in England. No longer did he have to act as New Zealand's press agent.

Any move he made was immediately reported and in characteristic Seddon style there was plenty to report. His amazing energy and his constant travelling throughout England made him widely known and immensely popular with the British public. Although his constant
preaching on all subjects made him unpopular in some circles, he blustered his way through meeting after meeting giving his opinion on anything and everything. His advocacy of Imperial protection and preferential trade brought him into conflict with the English liberal free traders but he was sincere in his beliefs and continued unmoved. At Southampton on July 15, he made his views clear:

"The colonies are quite able to provide all the food stuffs necessary for the Empire and our aim should be to become a self-sustaining Empire. In this lies our greatest security". 36

He became more imperialistic than ever, more sure of himself, more conscious of his role as protector of the Empire and leader of its most loyal colony.

At the end of June 1902, Chamberlain opened the Conference:

"I say the paramount objective is to strengthen the bonds which unite us and there are only three principal avenues by which we can approach this object. They are through our political relations in the first place; secondly, by some kind of commercial union; in the third place, by considering the questions which arise out of imperial defence". 37
It was decided that the first question that should be discussed was that of naval defence. Seddon had previously expressed the wish that the Australasian Squadron be strengthened and intimated that New Zealand was "prepared to undertake its share of the responsibility and expense". The admiralty informed Chamberlain that the Australian Squadron was sufficient to meet the requirements of a state of war and he communicated this to Ranfurly asking that Seddon be thanked.

Seddon submitted a resolution before the Conference, proposing a modernization and strengthening of the Australian Squadron. The extra cost to be entailed was to be defrayed in the same proportion as provided under the existing agreements. The discussion that followed showed a considerable difference of opinion existed among the Premiers and it was agreed that they should each meet individually with the Admiralty. These discussions resulted in a new Australian Naval Agreement in which New Zealand raised its contribution from £20,000 to £40,000 in return for a promise of more ships to be stationed in Australasian waters.

Seddon had managed to get an Act providing for the establishment of a Reserve force through the New Zealand parliament in 1900. On the basis of this Act, he suggested that it was desirable to have an Imperial
Reserve Force formed in each of His Majesty’s dominions over the seas, in case of emergency. The force was to be under the joint control of the Imperial and Colonial Governments. Although this suggestion received some initial support from the representatives of Cape Colony and Natal, Canada and Australia were not prepared to ask their Parliaments to sanction any military expenditure beyond that necessary for their own defence. They thought that the suggestion detracted from the power of self-government enjoyed by the colonies. In the face of this opposition the resolution was withdrawn.

There was no immediate possibility of a Council of Empire being established but Seddon thought that triennial conferences might lead to closer union. After a short discussion it was finally agreed "that it would be to the advantages of the Empire if Conferences were held, as far as practical, at intervals not exceeding four years".

A considerable amount of time was spend discussing closer commercial union between the colonies and England. Seddon was one of the most vocal leaders of an energetic colonial attempt to get England to abandon free trade and build up a system of imperial customs. The discussion centred on his resolution that "preferential tariffs by way of rebate of duties on British manufactured goods carried in British owned ships should be granted, and that in the Mother Country rebate of duty on colonial products
now taxable should be conceded". Most Premiers thought that some advance towards establishing closer trade relations should be made but no general agreement could be reached. When Seddon met the President of the Board of Trade he undertook to recommend to his Government a general preference of ten per cent for British manufactured goods. This led to the Preferential and Reciprocal Trade Bill of 1903. In effect this Bill gave some preference to British goods by increasing the duties on foreign imports.

Other resolutions moved by Seddon dealing with the mail services, regulations governing coastal shipping laws, and the right of professional men in Australasia and Canada to practise in South Africa were amended by the Conference.

There is no doubt that he was bitterly disappointed with the outcome of the Conference. Amendments had taken away most of the effect of his resolutions and he realised that very little had been achieved. He had indicated that he still considered federation to be the ideal but the amendments to his resolutions frustrated the attempt for closer union. The attempt to establish an Imperial Reserve Force and the increased contribution to the Royal Navy show that he thought New Zealand's best security lay in helping Britain. In 1902, New Zealand had nothing to gain from the establishment of such a force.
She felt herself in no way threatened by any major power. There was no hint of an internal disturbance in New Zealand. The period of expansion in the Pacific was over. This offer was an example of his ultra-imperialistic spirit - his desire to establish firm bonds to protect the imperial destiny. Perhaps this was in his mind when he commented after the Conference was over that, "Commerce is very important, but there is something more important still, and that is the binding together of the Empire". ⁴⁷
NATIONALIST OR IMPERIALIST

Seddon's plans to give naval and military aid to Great Britain show that he thought New Zealand's best security lay in helping the Mother Country. Although there is little consistency in his imperial policy his actions at the two Conferences show that he wanted a stronger Empire in which New Zealand could influence the decisions of the Imperial Government. He was not bound by any definite policy but was prepared to share the burden of maintaining Britain's position as the major colonial power in the world.

His practical proposals for united action by the Colonies and England enhanced his reputation as the greatest of all colonial imperialists. His imperialism was "all-embracing" and because of this inconsistencies are apparent. The determination with which he kept New Zealand out of the Australian Federation is an example of his wish not to see her lose her own national identity.

The alternative to joining the Australian Commonwealth was obvious - New Zealand's independence could be safeguarded by her participation in a stronger Imperial Union. His offer of troops to Samoa and the Colony's contribution in the Boer War are practical examples of his pure imperialism.
To the public and statesmen of the time he appeared as the champion of British imperialism and to them it did not seem that he wanted an extension of New Zealand's independence. This can be best seen from the following quotation written as a tribute soon after his death:

"He was a statesman with no local or narrow outlook; he surveyed and gauged the needs and aspirations of an Empire. He was in the highest and best sense of the term an Imperialist. Fervidly patriotic, he was always foremost in urging upon his people the necessity for being prepared to make all conceivable sacrifices for their country. His unestimable services to England during the Boer War we have already recounted. His advocacy of free trade, his insistence upon the increase in naval subsidy, his demand that England should guard the frontier of her Empire in the Pacific against rivals or enemies - all these facts mark him out not only as a firm believer in Imperialism as a creed, but a statesman able to appreciate at their true value, the ever-changing conditions of international policy." 48
REFERENCES

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

A to J for Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives of New Zealand.
C.O. for Colonial Office.
O.D.T. for Otago Daily Times.
p. for page.
pp. for pages.
vol. for volume.

1. O.D.T., 24 May, 1893.
6. N.Z.P.D., vol. 97, p.72, (8 April, 1897)
8. Ibid, p. 79.


12. Compare The New Zealand Graphic Memorial Number, 27 June, 1906, p. 34.


29. ibid, p. 96.
30. ibid, p. 81.
31. Sinclair K., Imperial Federation, p. 31.
32. C.P.T., 6 Dec. 1901.
34. Quoted in Lyttleton Times, 28 May. 1902.
42. ibid, pp. 20-22.
43. ibid, p. 24.
44. ibid, p. 26.
45. ibid, p. 27.
46. ibid, pp. 27-8.
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A - 4 Proceedings of Conference between the Secretary of State and the Premiers of the Self-governing Colonies.


1903 A - 4 Papers relating to the Premiers visit to South Africa.

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