

Since I last met you the Right Honourable Sir Joseph George Ward, Bart., K.C.M.G., at my request undertook to form a Ministry. On the 10th December last he was appointed Prime Minister, and the Ministry is now in office.

I regret exceedingly that during the recess the Honourable Sir Charles Perrin Skerrett, K.C.M.G., K.C., Chief Justice, passed away. During a long and illustrious career he rendered eminent public service to New Zealand, and his untimely death was a national loss. The Honourable Michael Myers, K.C., has been appointed to fill the vacancy.

It is also with deep regret that I refer to the calamitous earthquake which the Dominion recently experienced, and I join with you in extending sincere sympathy to the relatives of those who lost their lives in the disaster. My Government have intimated that generous practical assistance will be provided for those who have unfortunately suffered loss, and measures for relief have been undertaken.

My Ministers are firmly attached to the principles of the League of Nations, and are determined to take any steps possible to forward the great work of the League, and, in particular, that of peace and disarmament. In this connection New Zealand had the honour in August last of accepting the invitation to become one of the fifteen original signatories of the multilateral Pact for the Renunciation of War, commonly known as the Kellogg Pact, and has also taken the further step of ratification. This Pact has received almost universal acceptance by the nations of the world, and its solemn renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy has been described by a European statesman as "the greatest collective deed born of peace." While the Pact has not, of course, entirely removed all danger of the evils of warfare, this general renunciation of war, accepted, as it is, by all the nations who only a decade ago were engaged in the greatest struggle in history, must inevitably hasten the progress of world-wide disarmament and strengthen the cause of international peace.

My Ministers will heartily support any practicable proposals for disarmament, and, as one step in this direction, they have recently signified New Zealand's acceptance of the Geneva Protocol of June, 1925, prohibiting the use in warfare of asphyxiating, poison, or other gases, and all bacteriological methods. Until definite proposals for disarmament have been prepared and generally accepted, however, they feel it their duty to maintain such measures as are necessary for the safety of the country.

No change of policy is contemplated in respect of naval defence.

As a necessary auxiliary to the naval and land defence of New Zealand, and as an aid to commerce and communication, my Government are impressed with the importance of aviation; and it is their intention to take every feasible step to promote interest in this subject throughout the Dominion. It is hoped that the general establishment of Aero Clubs will assist materially in this direction. Steps are being taken to maintain close connection with the Air Ministry in the United Kingdom, and New Zealand officers are being seconded for this purpose and for further training.

The position in the Mandated Territory of Western Samoa continues to cause some anxiety, and there still exists in the Territory a movement, among a considerable section of the Samoan people, of dissatisfaction with the Dominion's administration. My Government have decided to continue a policy of patience, and have made it clear that while it is their intention to govern the Territory with justice and equity to all and with sympathetic consideration to the interests of the Samoans, they must administer the law, and will continue to do so with firmness if the position requires it. It has been intimated that while the Government cannot negotiate with any movement that is openly flouting the law, the disaffected section of the Native population may be assured of a full discussion and a generous consideration of any representations so soon as their refusal to comply with the law is abandoned.

My Advisers recognize that the material prosperity of the Dominion cannot be fully achieved without industrial peace, and they hope to maintain the existing good relations in all branches of industry.