

EMPIRE PREMIERS MEET

IDRIS COX

COMMONWEALTH Prime Ministers meet again in London this month. The main topics for discussion are the unsolved problems from the last meeting—and some new ones! The effect of G.A.T.T. (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) is again up for review; and convertibility of sterling is still a thorny question. But main attention will be given to military problems, and especially to the new situation in Asia after the Geneva peace settlement on Indo-China and the commitments made under S.E.A.T.O. (South-East Asia Treaty Organisation); and the new links in the Middle East after the signing of the agreement on the Suez Canal zone. The title 'Commonwealth' sounds democratic and gives the impression of being all-embracing. It does not include the colonies, though it is from the exploitation of the 80 million people under direct colonial rule that the bulk of the sterling balances in the British banks comes.

Though confined to Dominion Premiers the gathering is not exactly a happy family. Apart from their common problems arising from increasing United States penetration and their commitments to its war plans, each of them has special problems as well as serious differences with one another.

Last May the Menzies Government of Australia scraped through the General Election with a small majority of seats, but a minority of the total votes cast. Even this narrow escape was achieved only by launching the Petrov frame-up just before the election, as did the Tories in Britain in 1924 with the Zinoviev letter. After Dr. Evatt's trenchant exposure this Menzies plot has recoiled upon the author's own head, and has severely shaken his political standing.

Canada's trade with the U.S.A. is expanding—at the expense of Britain. Far from strengthening Canada's position the effect is to distort her whole economy. This year unemployment reached the peak figure of 580,000. And as yet there is no sign that Canada's ruling class intend any drastic steps to resist growing U.S. domination. More than likely, Canada's Premier will urge the London Conference to make changes to suit the United States, particularly in regard to G.A.T.T. and the convertibility of sterling.

However, the biggest political headache for the Dominion Premiers comes from the growing estrangement of India, over the slavish adherence by Britain and most of the Dominions to the

United States war plans in Asia. Britain is a member of S.E.A.T.O. and so are the 'white' Dominions. India and Ceylon are not members. Pandit Nehru has openly condemned this new threat to the Asian countries. At the same time, the deadlock between India and Pakistan over Kashmir still remains. Nehru has expressed serious concern about the attacks on the status of Indians in Ceylon. India's relations with the Malan (now Strydom) white supremacy régime in South Africa are extremely strained.

Pakistan reels from one crisis to another. The majority of the people are against the present régime, and neither United States 'aid' nor the repressive measures of Ghulam Mohammed, the governor-general, have been able to create stability. Nor is the position much better in Ceylon. Faced with the growing United Front movement and the rising militancy of the trade unions, Sir John Kotelawala, Prime Minister, makes a prolonged visit to Britain and the U.S.A. to appeal for 'economic aid'.

All in all, the 'Commonwealth' meeting of Dominion Premiers will not serve to solve the serious and urgent problems confronting the peoples of the Empire. It can be expected to turn a blind eye to the pressing demands of the millions of colonial peoples and to adopt more ruthless measures for their exploitation and suppression; and to remain silent on the grave issues of the wars in Malaya and Kenya. It is unlikely to take any effective measures against the biggest menace to all the countries of the Empire—the aggressive measures of United States imperialism. It is United States penetration which weakens the trading relations between the Empire countries, undermines their position in the export markets, and imposes upon them ever-increasing burdens of military expenditure—the inevitable concomitant to their co-operation with the U.S.A. in its war plans.

The alternative to this disastrous policy is for the peoples of the Empire to unite in a firm alliance to achieve their national independence. This calls for firm resistance to United States domination, the expansion of trading relations within the Empire countries for their mutual benefit, and friendly trading relations with all countries. Its achievement will depend on the strength and success of the growing popular movement to end the exploitation and murder of colonial peoples (most brutally expressed in Malaya and Kenya) and win full support to their demand for freedom and national independence.

Above all, it depends on united opposition to the reactionary war alliance with the United States rulers and the crippling arms pro-

gramme which impose heavy burdens and lower living standards on the peoples of the Empire. In this respect the united fight of the peoples of the Empire is inseparable from the common struggle of all peoples to maintain world peace and advance on the road to freedom and democracy.