

## AUSTRALIA AND THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

### Mayor J. R. Firth's Radio Address

IN A RECENT broadcast over the Sydney Station 2CH, Alderman J. R. Firth, Mayor of Strathfield, spoke of Australia's duty to honour the Atlantic Charter. His speech has been published in a *Christian World* print; we give the following extracts:

"Without the restoration of mutual confidence in the value of promises no nation can emerge successfully from the ghastly holocaust of war into the still waters of peace. . . . Yet when I read the report of the Australian Tariff Board on Post-War Reconstruction I sought in vain for any indication that Australia should honour the pledges of the Atlantic Charter, even if it meant, as it does mean, throwing overboard our protectionist policy.

"The report says that 'trade agreements must recognize that sovereign democratic governments must have full autonomy in the control of internal activities, including industrial development.' The above sentence means, I take it, that no matter what pledges we make or endorse, we still retain the right to dishonour those pledges if, when the time comes, keeping our word might, in the view of some, interfere with our industrial development.

"If the Tariff Board's views are endorsed by the Australian Parliament it will be a clear indication that Australians have learnt nothing from the recent past—that we still cherish our sovereign right to dishonour the pledges of the Atlantic Charter, our sovereign right to ruin the industries of other nations by tariff preferences and dumping—our sovereign right to adopt an exclusive nationalistic policy and thus to make another world war inevitable."

By contrast, Alderman Firth quoted the sentiments of Mr Sumner Welles, who explained the principles of the Atlantic Charter in a recent address before the National Trade Convention in New York City, when he said:

"Trade—the exchange of goods—is inherently a matter of co-operation, but a glance at the past is enough to show that in the policies of nations this simple truism has been more often ignored than observed. Nations have more often than not undertaken economic discriminations and raised up trade barriers with complete disregard for the damaging effects on the trade and livelihood of other peoples, and, ironically enough, with similar disregard for the harmful resultant effects upon their own export trade. They have considered foreign trade a cut-throat game, in which each participant could only profit by taking undue advantage of his neighbour. Our own policy at times in the past has, as we all know, constituted no exception. . . .

"Many foreign countries, which had not recovered from the shock of our U.S.A. tariff increases in 1921 and 1922, and were tottering on the brink of economic and financial collapse, were literally pushed into the abyss by our tariff action of 1930. Throughout the world this withering blast of trade destruction brought disaster and despair to countless people.

The resultant misery, bewilderment, and resentment, together with other equally pernicious contributing causes, paved the way for the rise of those very dictatorships which have plunged almost the entire world into war. . . .

"This set of basic principles, appropriately called 'The Atlantic Charter,' deals with commercial policy in its fourth point, which reads, 'They will endeavour, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.'

"The basic conception is that your U.S.A. Government is determined to move towards the creation of conditions under which restrictive and unconscionable tariffs, preferences and discriminations are things of the past; under which no nation should seek to benefit itself at the expense of another; and under which destructive trade warfare shall be replaced by co-operation for the welfare of all nations."

Alderman Firth amplified Mr Sumner Welles's statements by emphasizing that the fourth point of the Atlantic Charter calls in effect for the universal abolition of all tariffs, exchange restrictions, export prohibitions, and dumping arrangements; and he proceeded:

"If we are all agreed that the Atlantic Charter must be honoured, why not honour it, as far as is possible, now? This would mean abolishing all trade barriers between Australia and all the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, between Australia and the U.S.A., between Australia and Russia, and between Australia and China. Not only would this be of infinite benefit to all the nations within this free trade area, but it would also be a very great inducement to other countries to join the United Nations and thus to secure the economic benefits enjoyed by those inside the above outlined area. If we do this now it will then be a thousand times easier to honour in full the promises of the Atlantic Charter at the Peace Conference—it will only then be necessary to enlarge the existing free trade area—this will be difficult enough owing to the pressure of vested interests, but if we weaken to some extent those interests now, they will be more readily withstood at the Peace Conference table.

"I am not imagining that these vested interests will be easily withstood—the history of the Peace Conference of 1919 shows how the solemn promises of the Armistice Agreement were ignored—how the newly created independent European States were allowed to erect trade destroying tariff barriers under the plea 'self-determination for small nations.' A plea endorsed by vested interests, who made money out of it.

"In the Armistice Agreement No. 3 of President Wilson's Fourteen Points was embodied, viz., 'The removal, so far as is possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations

consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.'

"If this Armistice promise had been honoured the self-determination of small nations might have proved workable—might have proved a blessing to Europe instead of a curse. May I remind you that the 1919 Peace Treaties created as independent States—Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and Jugo-Slavia. . . . The Peace Treaties made them independent States, and the first use they made of their independence was to create tariff barriers against each other—thus the old internal free trade area of the Austrian Empire was destroyed and five small economic units were created. The five States carved out of Austria were free and independent politically, but their people were worse off economically than when under Austrian rule—in Poland very much worse off. The peoples of the five new States also overlooked the fact that tariffs create ill-will—not only create ill-will but continually add to the ill-will created.

"The cold, hard facts are that the nations of the world must co-operate or perish—we must trade freely, or, after a brief interval, we will again be plunged into war.

"We may blame armament manufacturers, we may blame dictators, but the real blame lies at the door of the voters. In a book, *The Price of Peace*, the authors write: 'It is not the munition-makers but the masses, who by their votes elect and support governments and administrations committed to the pursuit of policies of economic nationalism, who are the real "merchants of death." Italian Fascists, German National Socialists and Japanese Imperialists, despite their common doctrine of violence, have done no more to make future wars inevitable than has the American Democracy by means of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff, the war debt policy, and its performance at the London Economic Conference. It is, to be sure, unmistakable that a country as richly endowed materially as is the United States can, at least temporarily, achieve domestic prosperity by means of purely monopolistic economic policies. But it should be equally evident that a people which permits and encourages its government to pursue such policies deliberately bolts and bars the door to world peace.'

"What is true of the people of the U.S.A. is equally true of the Australian voters—have we learned our lesson? Will we insist on Australia implementing the Atlantic Charter, and, *within the framework of the United Nations*, implementing it now?"

In the House of Commons on 19th January Mr R. W. Sorensen asked the Health Minister "if he is aware of the many negotiations in real estate now taking place in which land is being sold for three or more times its pre-war value, and in view of the disquiet this is causing and its effect on post-war housing and rents, if he proposes to take any action in the matter."

Reply was given by Miss Horsbrugh, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, that the whole question was being considered by the Government in the light of the Uthwatt Report.