THE ROYAL EMPIRE SOCIETY ESSAY COMPETITION 1956.

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Topic No. 2.

"Colonial" powers are heavily criticised in the United Nations for having colonies at all. Write a speech which a delegate from a Commonwealth country might make in reply to such criticisms."

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PREFACE.

I do not believe that any one of the following points can be singled out and labelled as in some particular way more characteristic than others of the British system, but they all will invalidate the criticisms made against Britain.

Introduction.

1. The three Stages of British Colonial History.
2. What is understood by the Commonwealth and Empire.
3. Stable administrative and fiscal systems - the first benefits of British rule.
4. The principle of 'Trusteeship.'
5. The Commonwealth stands for freedom and self-development; Britain has never followed a policy of assimilation or integration.
6. Britain brought the ideas of 'freedom' 'democracy' and 'nationalism' to her Colonial subjects.
7. Native or Indirect administration.
8. The change in status of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon justified Britain's policy.
9. Britain's undertakings which brought freedom, democracy, and economy to the Colonies:
   a) Freedom from slavery.
   b) Freedom from internecine warfare.
   c) Freedom from disease.
   d) The development of roads, railways, and communications.
   e) Scientific advances.
   f) The provision of education.
   g) The unlimited use of British capital.

10. If Britain withdrew her support from the Colonies could the United Nations carry on where she left off?


12. The British system offered development towards autonomy and freedom.

Conclusion: Colonialism has been an important phase in the modern world.
Mr President,

I stand here today, as a delegate from a country which is joined in free association with the British Commonwealth of Nations, to refute the grossly misleading criticisms made against Britain and her so-called 'Imperialism' and 'possession' of colonies.

I wish to make clear the position of Britain in regard to her Colonies and the Commonwealth; to give some idea of the colossal works undertaken by Britain for her Colonies; and over a period of nearly two hundred years, the considerable benefits received by her subject territories; to explain briefly Britain's Colonial policy in regard to politics, culture, and social services and economy; and then finally to show how unjust the criticisms of certain delegates are. For Britain has been accused of suppression, exploitation and of pursuing a policy of integration with her Colonies. All these accusations, however, are false and have no substance and in the light of the facts, reported with strict honesty, will fade out and vanish.

I will, therefore, begin at the beginning of British Colonial history. There have been three main stages. The first stage came to an end with the secession of the American Colonies in 1776.

The second stage was that of the evolution of the 'white dominions': Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, towards full self-government, dominion status as defined by the Statute of Westminster 1931, and eventually
free and equal membership of the Commonwealth after the last war.

The third and perhaps the most difficult and crucial stage of colonial history was that of applying to Asian and African and other colonial societies the same principles of political democratic development that had governed the evolution of the 'white' dominions towards independent status and equal partnership. As a single arbitrary pattern of government was manifestly impossible for all the various peoples, creeds and cultures which compose the British system, there was a constant effort to find the forms of government most appropriate to local circumstances and the pattern of social development. Britain's experience with the 'white' dominions, from which she learnt the necessity and advantage of transforming an empire into a free association of peoples, helped her to deal with the problems of the third stage, when she was confronted with the growing nationalism of her territories in Asia and Africa. As in all human actions selfish and altruistic motives, liberal and reactionary trends, have struggled with one another in the shaping and application of British Colonial policy from the earliest times. But it will remain true that the results of British rule over a colonial empire comprising (before the achievement of independence by India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma,) some 450,000,000 souls, have been a notable contribution towards human progress in the administrative, political and cultural fields.
The British Commonwealth and Empire, however, is the least understood politico-social system in human history. The foreigner can hardly be blamed if he mistakes and misunderstands, and misinterprets it.

The British Empire, however, as a political unit does not exist. It has nothing resembling a unitary or federal constitution. It has no resemblance to classic empires: no one centre of government; no uniform pattern of law or administration; no common citizenship. It is a loose mesh of economic, cultural and social interests. It is as Stanley Baldwin once said, "the natural and spontaneous product not of its own necessities only, but of those of mankind."

During the Pacific War, Australians and New Zealanders were frequently advised by Americans to follow the example of 1776 and cast off the tyrant's yoke. But they have no yoke and never have had any yoke to cast. The British system has given freedom and it has endured. It stands in contrast to the autocratic and authoritarian systems. The criticisms of autocracy and suppression fired at Britain have no basis.

The first benefit gained by the colonial peoples from British rule was security and order based on the conception of a universal equality before the law, and an efficient administrative and fiscal system.
This was no mean advantage, since British rule often took over from regimes characterised by corruption, nepotism and despotism. Yet this advantage by itself, while ensuring justice and security for the individual colonial subject, was not enough to safeguard his political birthright and provide for its eventual satisfaction through democratic freedom. The great safeguard which effected this purpose and gave British colonial policy its ultimate political direction was the principle of 'trusteeship.'

This principle was first enunciated by Edmund Burke in 1788. It meant, fundamentally, that the territory was the property of its people and would always remain so; that the British people or the British Government held it in "trust" for its people, and were pledged to act in the capacity of a guardian looking after the interests of his ward.

This principle remained. It was there to inspire and to be appealed to by colonial peoples, as well as to shape and chasten the political thought of Englishmen on imperial and colonial questions for all time. It was one of those principles that are destined to dominate and fructify.

Once you admit or profess that you are occupying a country 'in trust' for its people, you put, by implication, a time-limit on your rule, and commit yourself to a policy aiming at the development of self-governing institutions in that country, even to the point of ultimate independence. A guardian must accept the fact that his
ward is bound to grow up. Accordingly British policy has always been planned with this ultimate in mind. That she has held Colonies simply for her own selfish ends is completely unjustified. British colonial policy has followed a course of evolution towards the complete handing over of authority to democratically representative governments in the various parts of the Empire. This final complete handing over is the fulfilment of a policy initiated by Britain and inherent in the principles of her statesmen.

It must be realised and completely understood that Britain never pursued a policy of assimilation in the sense of trying to Anglicise colonial peoples culturally, while integrating them politically with the mother country by giving them representation at Westminster. Rather she has accepted and fostered local nationalisms, treating her colonies throughout as possessing an autonomous existence that must develop along its own lines towards independence, with perhaps, as the conception of the Commonwealth evolved, a free and voluntary position in it, rather than towards any fusion or even formal federation with the mother country.

It is a fundamental fact which must be borne in mind that the British Commonwealth of Nations does not stand for unity, standardisation, or assimilation or denationalisation; but that it stands for a fuller, richer and more various life among all the nations that comprise it.
Britain declared that it was her intention to act as trustee for her colonial empire and she has lived up to that promise. She has safeguarded the dependents from exploitation, preserved intact and as far as possible improved their position, and seen that the income was enjoyed by the recipient of the trust.

No longer, however, is the object of colonial policy viewed solely as the protection of the native peoples from exploitation. The emphasis now lies on the necessity for the active and systematic promotion of native welfare; and then also the principle of extending self-government has behind it all the force of sentiment which is deep seated in the British character, another argument which refutes criticisms of suppression and integration.

The benefits received by the Colonies from Britain can never be overestimated. The British taught their colonial subjects English and gave them a western education at the higher levels. The choice between linking the colonial peoples with the west and keeping them culturally isolated within the framework of their own local heritage was decisively settled in India by Lord Macaulay before the middle of the nineteenth century. There can be no doubt of the wisdom or even inevitability of this decision in a world where progress, in so many directions, could be achieved only
along the lines of what is known as European civilization. Also in a large country like India, with so many local languages and dialects, the introduction of English as a 'lingua franca' was a potent unifying move. For generations India and the colonies have drawn on the most expensively educated elements of Britain for their administrative and social services. They have had much use of British capital; order and security were established, communications provided, and peoples educated sufficiently to contribute usefully to developing an economy.

Not only did English education impart to Indians and to other subject races in Asia and Africa the nineteenth century European concepts of 'democracy', 'freedom', and 'nationalism', but the English administrators themselves had the idea of representative institutions in their blood, and began to apply it tentatively and gradually to the countries under British rule.

The stages followed in giving the indigenous populations a growing share in the government of their countries were generally the same.

I would say a word here about the policy of Native or Indirect administration. This policy sought to use the traditional native institutions, particularly in tribal areas; it recognised and sometimes reconstructed the powers of local chiefs, and entrusted to them substantial administrative and legal functions.
There were three principle arguments in favour of this policy: firstly that a more healthy and durable form of self-government could be made to evolve out of traditional native institutions; secondly that in remote tribal areas indirect rule was cheaper and more efficient; and thirdly that it was wrong to leave the countryside eventually at the mercy of the town, and to hand over the vast, rural and tribal masses to the rule of the native bureaucracy in the capital when the time came for full self-government or independence. This was a policy that Britain adopted for the benefit of the tribal natives.

The greatest achievement and justification of British colonial policy is to be found in the handing over of India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Burma to their peoples after the last war. The first developed into three great states whose political ideas and governmental machinery came from the education and administration Britain had given them over a period of nearly two hundred years. The 'trust' proclaimed by Burke in 1788 had been honoured.

Especially in India were the benefits received great and of inestimable value. The great work done there cannot be forgotten or let to pass by unnoticed.

But today India's public debt is practically all owned in India and she has thus acquired the capital assets of 'reproductive' public works originally built by British capital. Britain's remaining investments in India are not more than £250,000,000; much less than India's own
investments in commerce and industry. India chose her constitution herself and established her status in the world as an independent republic, yet she chose to remain within the British Commonwealth. The Commonwealth can aid the Indian peoples, and the Indian statesmen can bring new values and perspectives to the Commonwealth. If India had elected for complete severance with no association with the Commonwealth, for she had every right to do so, it would have been for Britain to help her on her way as quickly as possible. As it was Britain did much to ease India over and to make the transition from Dominion to Republic as smooth and as easy as possible. Britain has given India unity and that sense of nationality which she so largely lacked over previous centuries. India has learned from Britain the principle of democracy and justice.

Likewise Pakistan and Ceylon were free to chose their own constitutions and what their futures would be. They both realised it would be within their interests to remain with the Commonwealth.

The same processes have unfolded in two African territories—Nigeria and the Gold Coast (now Ghana), and there was no reason to doubt that the ultimate issue would not be full independence.

Now, to explode these accusations that Britain exploited her Colonies and used them for her own selfish ends, let me take you back along the road which Britain
built for her Colonies; a road which lead to freedom, democracy, and economy.

Once, slavery kept Africa in constant warfare and poverty. Even as late as 1850 when Britain took an interest in Zanzibar, two-thirds of the people thereabouts were slaves. Africa, in war and slavery, was "bleeding out her life-blood at every pore."

In India, where fifty slaves in the eighteenth century fetched the price of one good horse, Warren Hastings and the East India Company blocked the export of slaves and stopped where they could the internal traffic.

In 1807, Britain prohibited any part in the traffic to her own ships and people, and slavery was abolished in all British Colonies in 1834. For fifty years, at heavy aggregate cost in men and money, the Royal Navy's chief occupation was a world-wide campaign against piracy and slavers. It is too readily forgotten that the peace on the seas in which modern commerce grew, was won to a large extent by Britain.

As with slavery so with internecine warfare. War, massacre, pillage, were endemic from the Gold Coast to Timor until the European appeared. The merchants and agents who went to India in the eighteenth century, reported peoples brought by tyranny to the final depths of deprivation and misery.

Disease and deprivation brought a correspondingly greater physical lassitude and rot. Ross estimated that
in a normal year 1,300,000 Indians died of malaria before its cause was discovered, and tens of millions were debilitated. Plague swept off millions in Asia and Africa almost every year.

Yet in a century Britain has done so much to transform the life of Asia and Africa. Not for her own gain but for the good of the peoples, as the history of tropical medicine shows only too well.

The British built roads and railways, and established communications. They opened regions to trade that had been inaccessible through all history. The roads were at once a sign of advancing order and a course for freedom.

Britain also began scientific planning. Rubber seeds went out from Kew to all Britain's tropical colonies in 1876. Agricultural departments with their research scientists and teachers appeared. Joseph Chamberlain opened the London School of Tropical Medicine in 1899. Health had become an essential condition of developing economies.

The new colonial economies called also for bookkeepers, cashiers, accountants, stenographers. The foremen, engine drivers, and policemen had to be able to read and write. So education had to be, and was, provided. Tradesmen and craftsmen were needed and technical education also became an urgent concern of colonial administrations. Schemes for universal and technical education required sufficient schools and teachers, and the problem of finance is tremendous. But despite all these difficulties by 1945 India had nearly
200,000 educational institutions.

For a century or more Great Britain was banker to most of Asia, Africa, and the New Worlds. British capital was sown into railways, factories, harbour-works, roads, and plantations from China to Peru. Everyone who wanted money for major works went to London for it in the nineteenth century. The colonies got it cheaper than anyone else.

The great part of the Commonwealth and Empire is now self-supporting. But its progress was for the most part due to steady irrigation from the reservoir of British capital.

The tremendous adventure of empire brought benefits, but its cost was large and less calculable. The mill-workers, the miners, the dockers did not grow fat on the proceeds of empire and it was disastrous to British agriculture. By the end of World War II an accountant might have argued that Britain's great role in the world had at the end impoverished Britain.

Yet human and material resources must still be applied to vast areas and populations if they are not to revert to old evils. Most of Asia and Africa is still desperately in need of technicians, teachers, commerce, and capital.

Empire was a method of applying national power to the larger problems. If it is shored and rejected a better substitute has to be found. The United Nations could
not meet the case. How would the United Nations aid India to train and support the 3,000,000 teachers needed if she is to continue in the courses of the modern world? Where in the policies of the United Nations is provision for the thousands of administrators, experts, and entrepreneurs still needed in the backward regions? The trustee principle caters for some. But what of areas freed from colonialism? What of autonomous but backward States? Backward peoples must have aid and solace if they are to remain free from poverty and fear.

For this purpose Britain has created a Colonial Welfare and Development Fund which is to spend £120,000,000 on health and education and services for agriculture, forestry, livestock, fisheries and secondary industries; on rural development, communications, water control and irrigation, housing and loans to local authorities. In 1947 the government of the United Kingdom also announced the creation of a Colonial Development Corporation with an initial authority to spend £100,000,000 on projects to develop colonial production and roads, railways, and research stations.

Nevertheless, with all said against the imperial system, it has at least imposed a measure of unity and community. The British system has offered peoples development towards autonomy and freedom within a general unity. It has become an association of peoples and they may join or depart at their own will. The work of empire was never done in London but was carved out by handfuls of men scattered
across the immensities: the merchants, agents and Commisioners. They built roads and bridges, cleaned the towns and killed the tigers, renewed the forests, taught hygiene, built dams, irrigated, reformed the agriculture, fought erosion, the tsetse fly, slavery and moral apathy, protected, policed, established order, and extended law. Thus the British system brought new beliefs, new thoughts. Empire has worked and woven endlessly new patterns of life and knowledge, social habit and economic interest. It has brought a deal of organization into a divided and distracted world. If it is such a poor thing, as some think, from the point of view of the people directly concerned it has yet to be bettered.

Thus I am sure I am right in saying that Colonialism has been an important phase in the modern world. Resulting from the impact of the European Nations on other continents, it has helped in the evolution not only of the countries that came under their rule but perhaps on the European states themselves.

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