

CLASS 'A'

TOPIC: THE COLOMBO CONFERENCE OF 1950 AS ILLUSTRATING THE PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE BRITISH

COMMONWEALTH TO-DAY.

EZRA PRIZE

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PREFACE TO ESSAY.

Hunger and Communism are twin allies. Unemployment leads to hunger, and in the modern world, the result of lack of economic development and stability inevitably is hunger. Around South-East Asia is hunger and unemployment; and above it, like a wolf lurking for its prey is Communist China. The South-East Asian countries themselves are rival factions than can hardly attain solidarity; this in itself is a fertile ground for the spread of Communism. Should Communism then gain yet another outpost in Asia, her conquest of the Eastern world will be virtually complete; and what then is the hope of Democracy?

According to Lord Boyd-Orr, "No military force can check the spread of Communism among the underfed peoples of Asia, who have borne poverty with resignation as something inevitable, if the Communists can deliver the goods and end hunger. They have come to believe that if they take control of affairs and establish

Not much of his
own thought but
good sense in
his extracts
and a fair
understanding
of what other
people have
thought and
said about
Colombo.

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Ezra prize
2nd reading
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Lord Boyd-Orr
"Everybody's", 27th
May, 1950.

Impress on
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I findy Refine
 sense of the
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 her character
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 Anti-Colonialist

a new order they will be able to abolish hunger. This revolt of poverty the worst aspect of which is hunger, is the fundamental cause of the upsurge in Asia, which is by far the most important problem today...." The combating of this Communist threat by means other than military force, is the chief aim of the Colombo Conference.

THE COLOMBO CONFERENCE.

There are several problems facing the British Commonwealth today, but the most acute of them are concentrated in South-East Asia. The views commonly held in the Asian countries of the British Commonwealth is that the strategic centre of the democratic world has shifted away from Europe to Asia, and the Commonwealth policy should be adjusted accordingly. Many people might be misled to think as the Moscow Radio depicted during the conference that 'the Conference was a deep laid scheme, with Great Britain as villain-in-chief, against the peace, progress and prosperity of South-East Asia'. What else can be further from the truth than this blatant propaganda. The aim of the Commonwealth is the fostering of democracy throughout the world and freedom for all peoples; in addition, the Commonwealth has vested interests in South Asia where three of her dominions are, including the colony of Malaya. Since after the war, there has been serious dangers

of Communist infiltration into these areas, manifesting themselves in the form of civil disobedience, nationalist upsurges, bandit-
terrorism and guerilla warfare. What then can the Commonwealth do, but to study the fundamental causes of these unrests, and suggest means to eradicate them in order to avoid serious repercussions that may result afterwards. It was due to this stage state of emergency, that the Colombo Conference was planned. It was found that the two main causes of this unhappy state of affairs in South-East Asia were economic and political, and it is from here that the problems that face the British Commonwealth today begin.

Excluding the
Three New
Dominions

After the last war, the economy of this area was almost wiped out due to the activities of the Japanese. The whole place degenerated into political chaos and lawlessness. Many people were left without homes and without food. A little while, the Communists gained victory in China and drove away the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek. With the distressing and restless situation in South-East Asia, Communism which always thrives on such conditions found an easy access into the area. Mr. Malcolm MacDonald's report of the area during the Conference gives a clear and vivid picture of the ^{place} area today. After the Communist victory in China, including guerilla tactics of warfare and intensified Communist

propaganda worsened the state of unrest in South-East Asia. All over the region, matters ~~are~~ became complicated due to the presence of Communist fifth columnists, local Communists and Chinese sympathisers. Already in Indo-China exists the Viet ^{Minh} ~~Minh~~ under Ho-Chi-minh, and with Communist reinforcement, the Bao Dai's regime can be easily expelled. Should they then gain control of Indo-China, their next ^{target} ~~step~~ will be Siam and Burma where they will lose no opportunity to exploit the present dangers in those countries, and come to the borders of India and Pakistan. With the great rice fields of Siam and Burma under their control, they can easily over-run the whole of South-East Asia. Malaya which already has a great deal of Communist under-currents, will simply be an easy prey for them. This is precisely the conditions and fears in South-East Asia today which the Commonwealth has to tackle.

These sad and gloomy conditions in South-East Asia and other recent developments in the Far East due to Communist avowal to dominate the world, bring us to another task of the Commonwealth as illustrated by the Colombo Conference; and that is the possibility of a third world war and how to avert it. Scarcely five years ago, the world emerged from one of the most devastating and destructive wars in history. At a time when the nations of the world are stretching out their hands to embrace peace, the menace of Communism has set in to divide the world into two, the

British Commonwealth as an integral part of the free world has a most vital part to play in the preservation of peace; and so it was one of the problems of Colombo to see that the Commonwealth still maintains its place as a champion of liberty, in a world ~~overshadowed~~ overshadowed by Communist-imperialism.

Another important problem that faces the Commonwealth is the long overdue peace Treaty with Japan. On close examination, several complications arise out of this Treaty. The Cansuwa plan failed due to Russia's insistence on the peace terms being framed by the Council of Foreign Ministers which meant the exclusion of other lesser powers which are not in the 'Big Circle'. On the other hand, China which is one of the Big Powers has become Communist, and according to past agreements ought to be represented in the Peace Treaty Conference. With these two Communist countries, Russia and China, it is evident that the conference may never reach any agreement when one considers the foreign policy of Russia and her satellites. Should the Treaty be concluded without them, they would claim that the Treaty is illegal and therefore not binding. On the side of the United States, it is a different question. Since the Communist victory in China and their threat on the South Koreans, General MacArthur has been very anxious about Japan. Developments in Japan are so perplexing that the more the Treaty is delayed, the more

dangerous the situation becomes. The prolonged occupation in Japan is leading to an unhealthy political situation; and the United States guardianship of Japan discourages a great deal of Japan economic self-help. The United States believes that democratic institutions have been established in Japan to a more or less great extent, and as a result has started a devolution of power to the Japanese government. But there are strong reasons to believe that forces of political and economic reaction are gaining ground in Japan, and there is a revival of Japanese nationalism. Under such restless circumstances, Japan may become an easy prey to Communism. The problem then is how to devise means to save Japan from the clutches of both extreme nationalists and Communist imperialism. So it becomes imperative that an early peace settlement is desirable. But the Commonwealth unfortunately cannot do much to bring it about without the consent of the United States, who due to ^{two} ~~several~~ factors ought to have respected views on the question. These are her military and economic strength in the Pacific and the eyes of the Commonwealth being set on her to supplement the Colombo plan in South-East Asia.

9 / Nor do these exhaust the vast jigsaw puzzle that face our great Commonwealth today. The next serious problem is the recognition of Communist China by Commonwealth countries. The question naturally arises, if Communism as a way of life

is ~~is~~ inimical to the interests of the Commonwealth, ought Commonwealth countries recognise a revolutionary Communist state like China?

Lord Vansittart,
'The Times' Jan. 17,
1950.

Lord Vansittart - a keen critic of the Commonwealth countries that recognised China, particularly the United Kingdom said, "... let us not play with words. We must judge this matter of recognition and all kindred matters, on grounds pervaded with greater reality than hitherto. Will immediate advantages equal ultimate losses? Does recognition mechanically stimulate the activities of fanatics all over South-East Asia? Will anything alter the implacable hostility of Communism to western civilisation or diminish the probability that we shall ultimately be at war with it? Add the matter of Tibet, which the Chinese Communists will invade, Is it wise to shake hands with a man who says that he is just going to crack a cock? When he does, 'what does A do?' Which column will add up more profitably in the end? Whichever way the balance works out, when has any government 'gone off the deep' quite so headlong, and at the cost of getting out of step not only with the United States but with most members of the Commonwealth?" As healthy and

Hugh Russell,
'The Times' Jan. 12,
1950.

Russell's statement provides more than a counterpoise to it. He said, "Nothing could have been more undesirable and harmful than for the Western powers to

have erected an 'iron curtain' around China, for it is only by maintaining contact with the Chinese that we can hope to keep the way open for friendship between their country and ours. In attaining this end trade is a most valuable ambassador. From a purely practical point of view, British trading interests in China are worth many millions of pounds and would not be lightly sacrificed. So far, it would seem that Mao Tse-tung's administration has, in general, adopted a policy of protecting British property. I think that this is a sign that, in spite of all professions to the contrary, it will in due course want to resume trade with this country. It is to be hoped that the recognition of the Peking government will hasten this resumption of normal relationships between China and her traditional markets...." Weighing these two arguments, it is plain that a policy of isolationism from the Peking government will ^{not} remedy the situation.

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The dis-unity among the Asian countries themselves, even though Colombo for very unsatisfactory reasons never gave it very serious attention is another Commonwealth problem. If the quarrel between India and Pakistan is not remedied, it may render ineffective the work of Colombo, chiefly because they are expected to give impetus to the purging of Communist influence in South-East Asia.

It is heartening to note that in the midst of these vast problems, the Colombo

'Times' Editorial,
Jan. 9, 1950

Conference offered several opportunities to the Commonwealth. As the Editorial of the 'Times' of the 9th January, 1950 finally remarks, "It is an opportunity for the Statesmen responsible for the foreign policies of all the Commonwealth countries to study means of complementary action over the whole field of international affairs. It can foster in the process, that personal understanding which in such a society of nations can be effective far beyond the range where the correlation of specific policies is possible."

(No paragraph)

← This summarises almost the whole opportunities offered by the Conference to the Commonwealth.

During the conference, the economic advisers of the Commonwealth held plenary meetings which enabled them to examine the broad field of Commonwealth economic problems, to pool information on the effects of revaluation and to assess future trends arising from it. It has offered Commonwealth Ministers the opportunity to survey jointly the position of the Sterling area's current and prospective balance of payments and to discuss the economic problems of the Commonwealth.

The United Kingdom despite traditional links with the Commonwealth has certain ties with Western Europe and the United States. The Colombo Conference has afforded the opportunity for a clearing of minds and understanding in Commonwealth

countries with regards to these ties; particularly the United Kingdom participation in Western Union with the various obligations and effects that it will have on Commonwealth countries. Also jointly with this is the review of the dollar crisis, as economics is a strong factor that is determining foreign policies.

Mr. Pearson
(Canadian Premier)

Mr. Pearson, the Canadian Minister, while reviewing ^{the} Conference said that "the Conference had provided an opportunity for a better understanding of the problem in the eastern world, and problems - like peace - were indivisible." This is one of the greatest opportunities that the Conference illustrated; it has proved that the Commonwealth system is a unique bridge between the free people of the east and west.

These are so far in a nutshell the problems and opportunities of the Commonwealth today as illustrated by the Colombo Conference. The question then arises on what had the Conference had done to see that these problems of the Commonwealth are met with vigorous fortitude. It is interesting to note that the British Commonwealth despite serious handicaps, is determined to face the situation boldly. Coming to the economic instability of South-East Asia, on the initiative of Mr. Spender, Australia's minister and the Ceylon delegates, the 'Mutual Aid Plan' was conceived. Again, on the initiative of the United Kingdom, government ~~is~~ will subscribe some loan to Burma to help her save her currency and

so encourage the marketing and transport of rice much needed by Ceylon, India and other South-East Asian countries. Apart from this, the International Bank may render some useful help; the Technical Assistance Programme of the United Nations is another source of deriving economic help. The recent Industrial progress in Western Europe could provide economic help for all parts of the world, South-East not exclusive. After Colombo, the American Point Four Programme was created, and this primarily for South-East Asia; at the meeting of the Ministers of the Commonwealth in London recently, the 'Colombo Plan' was initiated. I believe that after all these might have been done, a not negligible achievement would have been got to lessen the appeal of Communism in South-East Asia. Though it is evident that once a sound economic system has been established, a stable government may result, yet we cannot expect all to be well politically in such troubled waters as South-East Asia. This brings us to the problem of Bao Dai's regime in Indo-China. As it stands, India has some reasons for suspecting Bao Dai's regime with the belief that it is still a puppet of the French government and thereby does not want to give it recognition. But on the other hand, the Bao Dai's regime is the only hope of the free world in South-East Asia. Though the Conference never reached any agreement concerning the recognition,

yes - it is hoped that within a reasonable period, better understanding and wise counsel may prevail.

With regards to the Peace treaty with Japan, a working party of experts had been set up to examine the question. Though due to ~~the~~ factors already mentioned the initiative rests with the United States, but - the working party may go a long way to ease matters, for after all according to a report in the 'Times' of January 9, 1950, "A treaty in which international problems are settled internationally is preferable to a drift into a state of peace in which decisions of international consequence are taken ~~unilaterally~~ unilaterally by the United States."

The question of the recognition of the Peking government was one of the matters that was left undecided, somehow to the discredit of the Colombo Conference including the recognition of the Bao Dai's regime of Indo-China. But we cannot expect all to be right at the Conference nor can we be too strict in criticising it, considering the huge amount of success it had. Compulsions were not made, neither were executive decisions taken; for as Mr. Sauer, the South African representative said, "This absence of compulsion, which may be interpreted by some as the weakness of the Commonwealth, is in fact the greatest strength of the system."

Mr. Sauer
(South African Minister)

The Colombo Conference is

now history; its achievements are being made manifest in various ways despite the determined and concerted effort of Russia and China to impose Communism as a way of life on the different nations of the earth. So we of the Commonwealth remain hopeful and our faith is unshaken in ^{our} great system of nations. Colombo is an answer to Communism and as the 'Times' editorial of the 16th Jan. 1950 proudly concluded, "... it can be said — and said with pride — that the Commonwealth provides by far the best example of co-operation between free nations that has yet been seen and that it is, in important ways, the most advanced and most civilized of all international communities. If nations of different race and colour and religion can come together from four continents to discuss their problems in this easy, practical way, there is, in the long run, no reason to despair about the future of mankind."

'Times' Editorial
16th Jan 1950.

Books Consulted: (I) 'Commonwealth Survey'
21st Jan. 1950.

(II) Certain January Issues
of the London 'Times'
