

A

A

Royal Commonwealth Society Essay 1959-'60.

ELIZABETH MARGARET BURETT,  
26, NURSERY DRIVE,  
ACOMB,  
YORK.

V-0

A-1

W- $\frac{1}{2}$

Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

School: The Bar Convent, Grammar School,  
YORK.

BRIEFLY ENUMERATE SOME OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS FACING  
THE COMMONWEALTH TODAY AND DISCUSS ONE OF THEM  
IN SOME DETAIL.

### PREFACE.

Of all the problems that face the British Commonwealth today those of unity; mutual defence and trade; the attitudes of countries outside the Commonwealth towards 'colonialism'; and the problems of self-government, are the most important.

*Haec est in gremio victos quae rota recipit  
Humanaeque genus communis nomine fovit  
Matris non dominos ritu, curisque vocavit  
Quos domuit, nexuque pio longinquos revinxit.*

Claudian, *In Ty Com,*  
Stilich. lib. 150-3.

She was a mother country, not an oppressor,  
She gave civil rights to the nations she had subdued,  
She bound together the remotest regions with a tie  
of loyalty.



Briefly enumerate some of the main problems facing the Commonwealth today and discuss one of them in some detail.

Edmund Burke wrote in 1775 "The close affection which grows from common names, from kindred blood . . . . . are ties which, though light as air, are as strong as iron." But ties of common names and kindred blood alone are not enough to hold the Dominions, Colonies and Protectorates to their Motherland, this was proved by the revolt of the American colonies in 1776; not are such ties needed as the French of Quebec have shown; and it is clear that they cannot exist between whites and natives of tropical colonies. There is, however, a great bond of union when a family, with relatives in the "old country," settles overseas; and a common language will preserve friendship long after family ties are forgotten. Though something more concrete than this is needed to hold the Commonwealth together. Exchange of teachers and students between the different countries contributes towards the unity of the whole, and Scholarships founded by Cecil Rhodes



have enabled chosen men from the Commonwealth to study at Oxford and discuss their ideas with fellow students. Secrets and ideas, both Scientific and otherwise, are exchanged within the Commonwealth and the tours of the Queen inspire good will towards Britain. But in spite of this there is a continual outcry, especially from the smaller colonies & protectorates, for severance from Britain.

In past years the British Navy has kept the sea routes of members of the Commonwealth free from enemies and has preserved their shores, it was not merely a protection that Britain offered to the rest of the Commonwealth, but a combination of every part, according to its ability, in the protection of the whole. Nowadays however, in this age of missiles, rockets, and atomic weapons and bombs, mutual defence is impossible. To create a flexible and fully dispersed system both of planning, command and supply, the Commonwealth countries will, as some already have, find it more convenient to enter into arrangements, together or



separately, with countries outside the Commonwealth.

Mutual trade presents less exacting problems. At the moment one half of Britain's purchases and one third of her sales are made with the Commonwealth. Trade is greatly helped by the granting to goods, for example: the heavy duty on imports of Foreign sugar is reduced by a half for sugar from the Dominions and even more for the colonies. Occasionally serious trade disagreements arise within the Commonwealth as, for example, when a few years ago Britain found it cheaper and quicker to import Danish butter rather than that of New Zealand. The latter country threatened separation from the Commonwealth if this was allowed to continue.

The attitudes of the countries outside the Commonwealth towards British 'colonialism' are varied, but not one of them helps Britain in her task of keeping a united Commonwealth and of bringing the colonies up to a standard where self-government can be granted. The Arab states broadcast the most violent attacks against the Western World and 'colonialism'. The Cairo broadcasts,



which are in Arabic and Swahili, are received in Kenya, and take the line 'that the Mau Mau revolution in which white arms defeated black courage must begin again, not only in Kenya but in the entire continent of Africa, and must go on until Africa belongs to the Africans.' Indonesia, also, in the author of venomous attacks on 'colonialism' and Liberian officials are consistent in their stand against it. The Latin-American members of the United Nations lose no opportunity of vaunting 'anti-colonialism' and of denouncing the conduct of colonial powers. India tends to regard herself as a champion of under-developed countries and is opposed to 'colonialism'. She maintains that she can speak with recent experience of colonial status and can therefore understand better than others the disadvantages from which dependent peoples suffer. The U.S.S.R., which denounces imperialism and imputes "land-grabbing" motives to western Powers, has annexed since 1939, from friend and foe alike, some 266,000 square miles of territory with populations exceeding 22,000,000. In spite of what we believe the seven European satellites



are no more than colonies with Russians in many of the key-ports, and Russian-trained communists governing their countries for the benefit of Russia. Finally, the United States of America is the Administering Authority of a Trust Territory and also holds certain overseas "possessions." Her colonial policy is criticised freely by members of the Soviet 'Bloc' and others of the 'anti-colonial' group. The representatives of the United States accept their difficult role as representatives of an 'anti-colonial' Administering Authority, and, while they do not join with other critics of 'colonialism' in denunciations of the European colonial Powers, and generally vote with the latter against the more violent resolutions in the United Nations, they are inclined to "sit-on-the-fence" and frequently abstain from voting. This action is apparently intended to express general sympathy with an attack on 'colonialism' while disapproving of the methods and language used by the 'anti-colonial' sponsors of a resolution. Naturally enough, satisfaction is gained by neither side, and probably not even by the American representatives themselves.



Of the present British colonies some are already self-governing in internal affairs and on the verge of complete independence, while others are progressing towards the same goal. Britain has always encouraged the inhabitants of her colonies to look beyond the boundaries of tribalism to a larger nationalism and, as Lord Lugard writes, "if there is unrest, and a desire for independence . . . . . it is because we have taught the value of liberty and freedom, which for centuries these people had not known. Their very discontent is a measure of their progress." The impatience of these dependent peoples at the slowness of their constitutional advance therefore, should be viewed with sympathetic consideration rather than criticisms. The British policy is, and has been for many decades, that she should give all her dependent territories self-government, after she has taught the peoples of the countries concerned the art of governing themselves; and after she has trained an efficient and honest civil service, improved the economic conditions of each territory and, in short, developed the territory to such a state that



it would be able to face the future unaided.

The difficulty in carrying out this policy lies in deciding how the right to govern should be shared between peoples living within the territory who have different standards of culture and enlightenment, and, where the racial differences are not so acute, the pace at which self-government can be entrusted to the inhabitants.

Where racial problems do not arise there is little dispute regarding the ultimate objective, but there are usually considerable differences of opinion as to the timing of the changes planned, not only between the 'rulers and the governed' but also between British officials and non-officials and the subject peoples.

Some people believe that any form of 'colonialism' is inherently evil and that the only way to learn the art of self-government is by practical experience; they denounce periods of training or probation, grants of self-government by stages, as deliberate delay ~~the~~ and obstruction by imperialists. On the other hand there are people who genuinely desire happiness and prosperity for colonial peoples and who regard too hasty a movement



towards self-government as spelling disaster for the backward inhabitants who will be exposed to exploitation by a handful of their better educated compatriots and by foreign adventurers or to the bungling of untrained and incapable politicians.

There is a unanimous belief among British administrators and non-officials who have lived for long periods in colonial territories, that self-government is desirable and, indeed, inevitable; but also that the present movement towards the objective is too hurried and that those responsible are not taking sufficiently into account the true interests of colonial peoples and their different stages of cultural development. To consider the effect of self-government granted to a territory where the peoples are not prepared, attention should be paid to the tropical lands before the European Powers took control of them. In the majority of these countries there was incessant tribal warfare; head-hunting and cannibalism; slavery and human sacrifice; oppression and disorder.



The natural products of these lands lay to waste because the natives did not know their use and value. There was little trade and no effective development because of the chaotic conditions that existed under indigenous administrations. These countries seemed to have changed greatly within the last fifty years, but the majority of the inhabitants have made but a slight advance, in spite of a well-educated minority. Superstition still maintains its 'sinister grip' on the people and the corruption of politicians and civil servants is taken for granted. What then of the future?

There is a risk of an indigenous government ruining the economic prospects of a country by incapacity, and such a disaster, in these days of world-wide trade, would have repercussions in other countries also. Capital would not be made available for a country whose government was unreliable and distrusted, and few, if any, of the colonial territories could be developed without the assistance of imported capital. For example, it has been estimated, that



in the years 1870 to 1936 there has been invested, in Nigeria alone, a sum of over £75,000,000 of which nearly £35,000,000 was Government investment and over £40,000,000 private investment. Most of this money came from western Europe and especially from Britain.

The British administration has recognised its obligations, as part of the Dual Mandate, to protect the colonial populations by seeing that they receive a fair share of the increasing wealth of their territories. Universities and schools have been founded, and strong and impartial governments have shielded the peoples from all that was worst in their past history. It is the fashion today to decry 'colonialism', but it has saved millions of people from worse evils and the need for it has not entirely passed.

Whatever the benefits derived by colonial peoples, however, there are still the natural desires to secure independence and to be treated as equals by the other nations of the world. In some cases they may



4

believe they are being exploited, through the alleged excessive profits made by capitalists who operate in the colony concerned, and that independence will bring them a greater share in the wealth that is being developed. But if exploitation is happening then it would certainly increase on their independence.

The feeling of nationalism is nothing new, but it has been immensely stimulated by two world wars and the divisions of the 'white' nations. Most of the leaders, and followers, who are not merely hypnotised by the oratory of demagogues, are anxious to attain with independence that recognition of racial equality which they feel is denied to them as colonials. To underestimate this factor of the problem is to misunderstand the whole problem. It must not be overlooked, however, that a greater part of the population is not interested in the achievement of independence except in so far as their racial emotions have been stirred by oratory, or their cupidity aroused by promises which are intentionally or unintentionally misleading.



SIR  
ALAN  
BURNS

"The story is told, that after the victory of a communist-inspired party in British Guiana in the elections of 1953, a coloured woman went into a shop and, after careful examination of all the sewing-machines in stock, made her choice of one. When she was told the price and invited to pay she was most indignant and asserted that she had been told that when the new government was returned to power all the people would possess such things." This story cannot be vouched for but it is not improbable.

It is desirable now to examine the conditions that should exist before self-government is granted to a colony.

Obviously the colony must be large enough, both in population and area, to be able to stand alone. Next, financial resources and economic stability are essential before the colony can pay its way and encourage foreign capital. Naturally there must be a number of well-educated and trustworthy inhabitants able to carry on the business of administration and a



reasonable level of general education to make sure that 'self-government' does not mean exploitation of the masses by a few behind a facade of democracy.

In most of the colonies the first condition is easily met, though it is interesting to consider the future of St. Helena, with a population of less than five thousand and far from any land! Federation is the solution for the small West Indian colonies, and, for colonies such as Malta the placing of them on a similar footing to the Channel Islands in their relations to Great Britain may be the solution.

The second condition is a serious one and it is the poverty of the colonies and their doubtful economic future which slows-up the process leading to self-government.

Furthermore, independence would result in most cases in a less expert administration which would frighten away any capital and trade that the colonies could unearth.

In the past British colonial policy has paid as much attention to economic progress as to that of politics because the two must



advance together if true independence is to be attained. Great Britain, contrary to general belief, does not exercise any monopoly of trade with British colonial territories neither does she exploit the colonies in her own interests. Britain has not imposed any colonial taxes for her own benefit since the four and a half per cent export duty in some West Indian colonies was abolished in 1838, and has, on the contrary, repeatedly given financial aid on a considerable scale to the poorer colonies.

The third condition, that there must be a sufficient number of well-educated and trustworthy inhabitants is the most difficult to apply in practice. Few would disagree with the idea that a minimum standard of education is necessary but few would agree on what that standard should be and whether in fact it had been attained in any particular colony. Opinions differ between the natives of the colony themselves and between them and the British Government and even between Government officials. It is noteworthy to remember that



"the political leaders of the northern region of Nigeria, while just as desirous as their southern neighbours to attain self-government, did not agree with the latter's demands for independence in 1956. They feared that self-government for Nigeria would be domination by the southern politicians over the politically more backward north, and that they would be exchanging white control for control by men of another race and religion with whom they had little in common except colour."

As for the last condition, even where the leaders of the community are well-educated there is often doubt as to whether they can be considered trustworthy, and this is perhaps the most difficult qualification to assess. In different countries there are differing standards of political morality and it would be unreasonable to expect the same standards from inexperienced people as we would expect from our own politicians and civil servants, bearing in mind that, in days gone by, corruption was common in the United Kingdom.

However, even after making allowances, charges

SIR  
ALAN  
BURNS.



of corruption have been freely levelled against local Ministers in certain colonial territories from responsible members of the local population and an American Negro novelist has written that 'corruption is the one single fact that strikes dismay in the hearts of the friends of African freedom.'

Many experienced British officials do not dispute that men of ability and education are available in colonies but could a sufficient number be found whose honesty could be relied upon? For where the official or the politician is dishonest the population must pay the bill and where the population is uneducated and unable to understand what is happening there cannot be that check on corruption which public opinion should provide.

Can we be satisfied, however, that, if the conditions above are accepted as the correct criteria, they are met in all or any of the colonial territories where the demand for self-government is most insistent?

It is frequently suggested that the cause of all racial and political troubles among



colonial peoples today is that they are being allowed to move too fast, to run before they have learnt to walk. In a sense this is true, but it is also true that if they had been allowed to move a little faster in the past many of today's problems would not have arisen. However, it is little purpose to be wise after the event, or to consider what might have been unless we are able to learn from the past how to face the future.

The British Government appreciates its responsibilities for the dependent territories and has repeatedly stated its policy: — to lead these territories to self-government. It will carry out that policy in honesty and good faith, and the conscience of the British people can be trusted in this matter. There is no reason to believe that other nations are more conscientious than the British, or that the members of the United Nations who criticize British 'colonialism' are helping the dependent peoples in any way.

Far from the turmoil of international dispute, the agents of British "imperialism"



are carrying on patiently with their task, "knowing full well that time is better spent on quiet work than noisy argument."

---



BOOKS READ AND CONSULTED: —

- The British Commonwealth — Cohen.  
In Defence of Colonies — Sir Alan Burns.  
Task for Giants. — Hon. Patrick Waitland M.P.  
Origin & Growth of English Colonies — Egerton.  
Emergent Commonwealth — Sinnott.  
The Approach to Self-Government — Sir Ivor Jennings.  
Economic Geography of W. Africa — F.J. Pedlet.