DEVELOPMENTS IN KUWAIT

By E. A. V. de CANDOLE, C.M.G., C.B.E.

Report of a lecture delivered to the Society on Wednesday, November 3, 1954, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, G.B.E., K.C.B., in the chair.

The Chairman: It is my pleasant duty to introduce Mr. de Candole, who has kindly come to lecture to us and illustrate his lecture with slides. He started his career in the Sudan Political Service and has had a great deal of experience in that Service and in other parts of Africa; but for the last two years he has been with the Kuwait Oil Company in charge of what he terms External Affairs, which I understand means a sort of Foreign Minister. It is from that point of view that Mr. de Candole is going to speak now on "Developments in Kuwait" since the oil company commenced operations. We await with interest what he has to tell us.

I SHALL be giving an exhibition of pictures of Kuwait accompanied by remarks based on what I saw at Kuwait during my various visits in the past two years and, in particular, during the summer of 1954, when I spent nearly three months in Kuwait.

Kuwait has a two-hundred-year-old connection with Great Britain, and this close association has been a prime factor not only in the remarkable rise of oil production but also in the great development programme which is being carried out by the Ruler, Sheikh Abdulla al Salem al Subah, whose portrait you see before you. He is a man of great vision and sincerity of purpose who is using the revenues from oil to develop his territory and eliminate ignorance, poverty and disease.

My talk deals very briefly with recent social developments in Kuwait, particularly in the field of education. I will also mention something in regard to the work being done by the company in connection with the training and welfare of young Kuwaitis in its employ.

First, a glimpse of old Kuwait and the nature of the country round it, for until the end of World War II Kuwait was an old-fashioned but thriving Arab town with an economy based upon its dhow trade, shipbuilding and pearling, with a desert hinterland sparsely inhabited by Beduin tribes. You see one of the town gates which probably a fair number of those present, having been to Kuwait, will remember; also the wall, five miles in length, which encircles the old town and was built as a defence against the Wahabis when they were active in the area. In another glimpse of the old town you see how the water was distributed in skins carried by donkeys before the modern developments took place. A view of the harbour when it was just the foreshore of the centre of the town, with old breakwaters to shelter the dhows which are seen even today, and they still make voyages right down the coast of East Africa as far as Zanzibar and to India. There are, of course, no longer the number there used to be, but Kuwait is still well known for its dhows, the building of which still goes on. A typical scene in Kuwait today is a falconer with his bird, the people still being fond of falconry and the Sheikhs and wealthy people having their own falconers.

When oil revenues started pouring into the coffers in a big way after 1946, the Ruler decided to convert the town into a modern city which would surpass any other in the Middle East. I now show the new lay-out of Kuwait, based upon the following plan which is gradually being carried out: the development of an efficient road system; the replanning of the central area to provide a spacious shopping and commercial centre with modern Government offices and public buildings; the expansion of the town outside the walls by the development of self-contained neighbourhood units; and finally the creation of industrial, educational and health zones at Shuwaikh outside the walls. The Sheikh has employed the best possible town-planning experts to advise him as to these developments.

An aerial view of Kuwait shows the good progress already made in redeveloping the town. Notice the widened main arterial road and large roundabout; there are a tremendous number of motor-cars; the Sheikh who deals with Public Works estimates that there are 30,000 cars in the town, which for a small radius is a very large number of vehicles to deal with. Traffic control has been instituted.

Another aerial view of Shuwaikh and the new port shows the development of the specialized industrial zone. This contains the new port, water distillation plant, main power station and vast stores depôts. It is connected with Kuwait by an impressive dual carriageway five miles in length. The new harbour has involved tremendous dredging operations which, unfortunately, have come up against a very tough reef, so that the harbour is not yet complete by any means, but when it is it will eventually provide sufficient alongside-quay space for large vessels to come right in. At present only small ships can get alongside. The development programme has brought about great shipping activity in the import of goods and materials.

The first time I met His Highness Sheikh Abdalla, the Ruler, I asked what he proposed to do with all the money coming in from oil. He replied that he was concentrating on two things—one, to provide fresh water, because in the past there had not been any at all in Kuwait, and that was the best benefit he could produce; secondly, on training of the young and the health and welfare of the general community. That seemed to me a good enough programme, and I must say the Ruler is pursuing it with tremendous energy and success.

There is no time to describe the public works projects, but these include the provision of sufficient electric power not only for all the needs of the town but also to serve outlying villages. Perhaps the most appreciated of all is the supply of fresh water by distillation to a population among whom fresh water has been in the past a rare commodity brought from afar. This will eventually be supplemented by the Shatt al-Arab project, of which the survey has recently been completed. The first stage of this is a 43-inch pipeline from the river at Basra to Kuwait to provide 25 million gallons per day. The final aim is 75 million gallons per day. About half the water will be for domestic needs; the other half for irrigation. There is also a longer-term project for a canal. At present there is virtually no cultivation in Kuwait; it is desert and a desert which maintains very small numbers of livestock because the rainfall is scanty and uncertain and the coast is saline. The Shatt al-Arab pipeline will permit a large area of land not far from Kuwait to be developed and cultivated by irrigation. This is a very significant project and I am sure will be the real answer to the future of Kuwait.

The need for modern housing to accommodate the vastly increased population has not been overlooked, and a comprehensive plan has been prepared by town-planning experts which provides for eight self-contained housing estates outside the town, complete with light industries, shopping centres, mosques, schools and playgrounds. This by itself is a wonderful project far in advance of anything elsewhere in the Middle East.

Now for education, which comes second on the Ruler's programme. There is a new secondary school at Kuwait, just outside in the educational zone. This is the finest group of buildings erected as a result of the development programme. During my stay in Kuwait in the summer of 1954 I was able to see something of the wonderful new schools being built there. They are quite fabulous in the spaciousness and light of their design, the beauty of their construction and the lavishness of their equipment; in fact, they provide everything the educationist could desire. The new secondary school is foremost in the educational programme. It opened this year.

This great college is a magnificently conceived project on the most up-to-date and lavish lines—classroom blocks and laboratories, gymnasium, mosque, library and assembly hall, clinic, boarding houses, very pleasant bungalows for the teachers, swimming pool and playing fields. Its ultimate future has still to be decided, but it is well fitted to become the University of the Persian Gulf, attracting students from other lands. It already welcomes students from as far afield as Morocco and Algiers as well as Persian Gulf Sheikhdoms.

A few words in regard to education in general, as that was one of the developments of which I was able to see most, thanks to the energetic Director of Education, who put everything at my disposal and enabled me to visit the new schools. I was most impressed by them. Really remarkable progress has been achieved in education during the last few years under the enthusiastic direction of the Ruler and the Director of Education, Aziz Hussein.

In 1938 there were only four boys' schools with 600 pupils and 25 teachers and one girls' school with 140 girls and five teachers. Today there are 26 boys' schools catering for 8,642 boys with 509 teachers, and 13 girls' schools with 4,182 girls and 220 teachers. Six hundred of these teachers are foreigners, mainly Palestinians and Egyptians, as there has not yet been time to train Kuwaitis. The Palestinians are refugees who had to leave when Israel took over, and Kuwait is making a contribution to the refugee problem by employing Palestinians as teachers and in other capacities.

The educational system, based on the Egyptian Government system, is in three stages, each with separate schools:

1. Kindergarten stage.
2. Primary stage.
3. Secondary stage.

The kindergarten and primary schools are day schools and the secondary school is boarding. Midday meals are provided for all pupils, and the central kitchen when complete will provide 14,000 meals served by special vans to schools all over Kuwait. The meals are prepared in a central canteen set up under the advice of an experienced and well-known English firm. The meals are served in spacious dining-rooms on the cafeteria system in a very practical and hygienic way as well as being most enjoyable for the children. In addition to meals, clothes are provided for the children to wear at school. Secondary school boys wear European clothes, as these pictures show.

These pictures show a biology class at work in the old school and a handicraft class in a primary school. The new Technical College is not complete; it is hoped that it will be opened at the end of 1954 or early in 1955. On this the Sheikh has very sound views. He realizes the danger of concentrating entirely upon academic education and training up a large number of young men for "white-collar" occupations—men who will eventually be discontented because there will not be enough jobs for them. Hence the Ruler is going in for technical education in a big way. The Technical College will begin with 500 boys, but ultimately the number will be increased. In my view one of the most important needs is to train the young in skilled occupations, and one hopes there will be concentration on that rather than on producing a number of clerks.

It is in the educational sphere that the Ruler sensibly considers that Kuwait can be of most assistance to less fortunate Islamic countries. Kuwait State has built and maintains Arabic schools in Bombay and Karachi. It has also sent teachers to Sharja on the Persian Gulf. It has welcomed 30 students from other Arab countries, including Algiers, Morocco and Gulf Sheikhdoms.

All this means a tremendous expenditure. The education budget for 1953-54 will run into £3 million, leaving aside the capital cost of new schools.

There is no time to describe the medical projects. Kuwait already has a good hospital and mobile clinics and a new hospital, a T.B. sanatorium, a picture of which I show, and a network of rural clinics is included in the new projects. You will all, I think, agree that much credit is due to the Ruler for his wide and generous vision and concern for the welfare of his people.

We leave Kuwait and the State developments and go to the Kuwait Oil Company. I show aerial views of Ahmadi and the jetty and a typical gathering centre. The company's headquarters are at Ahmadi, 22 miles from Kuwait, and you see the residential and industrial areas coming along well; also the type of house provided for Indians, Pakistanis, Kuwaitis and other Arabs. There is a large Arab residential area, a self-contained village which the company is building at Ahmadi, which will provide eventually for a population of about 10,000, including the families and dependants of the company's Arab employees. There are usually four or six houses in a block, all furnished and equipped with electricity, water and gas. Each family house has the walled compound demanded by Arab custom. Already there are about 200 Arab families living in company houses at Ahmadi, and about 2,000 bachelors. A mosque has been built by the company and a clinic and schools also in the Arab village. In fact, the company has concentrated on providing the best possible working and living conditions for its employees.

Now I come to the last point with which I am dealing today, and as illustration of it I show you the Industrial Training Centre. When the company commenced operations in a big way it was realized that there were no artisans in the area; they had to be imported, mainly Indians, Pakistanis and a certain number of Arabs. The company, however, quickly started its own training establishment for the training of local Kuwaiti youths. This Training Centre at Magwa deals with about 250 Kuwaiti boys each year who are taught skilled trades. These young Kuwaiti Beduins mostly come from the desert and many still have their long hair in Beduin fashion. They start in a basic class where they learn to handle tools and learn the names of the tools; also they are acclimatized to the workshop atmosphere. Having completed the basic course they are drafted into a trade course, according to their aptitude. The trade courses carry them on for about two years, until they are able to take on jobs in the company; many of them, in fact, go down to Kuwait, where they find extremely well-paid jobs.

The courses at present being taught include carpentry, painting, electrical installation and maintenance, plumbing and pipe-fitting, diesel and vehicle fitting, machine operating, welding, sheet metal working, mobile plant operating and motor transport driving. The trainees are under no compulsion to remain in the company when their training is completed. During training they learn, of course, to deal with blueprints; most of them have to be taught to read and write. Instruction is carried on mainly in Arabic, but English words are used for the technical terms, which seems to me very sensible.

This Industrial Training Centre is making an important contribution to the economy of the State, in that it is not only training employees for the company but at least half the boys trained here go down to work in the town. In this way a class of trained artisans is growing up which will be of immense value to the State and enable it to dispense with importing artisans from abroad; in fact, there will ultimately be a cadre of skilled artisans who will form a most valuable element in the development of their country. Boys trained on the actual jobs go into the workshops and are employed in all possible departments of the company. The number of Kuwaitis going into higher positions in the company is ever on the increase.

In conclusion, I want to add a word or two as to the way in which the country is developing, apart from what you have seen on the screen. A tremendous change is taking place in Kuwait which is bound to affect the people there, and particularly the system of Government, which is patriarchal; that is to say, the Ruler is the head of his Government; he appoints all the Government officials and directs what shall be done with all the revenue which comes in, which is very great in proportion to the size of the territory. That is a very good system on which to run a small and compact territory such as Kuwait, but with the spread of education and modern ideas there will be a demand for changes and the Ruler will have that problem to cope with. It has not arisen in any big way so far because the effect of all the education is still ahead. The new Secondary School opened only in 1954, and the brainier boys who complete the secondary course are sent abroad for higher education. There are 182 Kuwaitis at present undergoing higher education abroad, of whom 121 are at Egyptian universities and 42 in England. Many of these young men will be employed in the Government.

Probably some here who have been to Kuwait and others who have not would like to hear a little in regard to the political atmosphere there. All that I can say is that it is good. There is a friendly relation with the British, based on long association and the very fine work which has been done in the Persian Gulf by the British representatives from the Indian Political Service or the Indian Army in the old days. There are very happy relations with the Sheikhs. It was a new area to me, but I was most impressed by that fact.

The task is not only to maintain that happy relationship but also to help the Sheikhs to cope with the trend which events are going to take in that part of the world. We have a big responsibility there because though independent they are all in the wider sense under British protection. Like all Arabs they are intensely proud and sensitive about any implied restraint on their liberty. It is necessary to deal with them on a basis of equal partnerships and extreme tact is necessary. There is, I am sure, a big field for British co-operation with the Sheikhdoms not only in the sphere of Government but also in developments such as I have illustrated today. Very fine work is being done by British contractors in Kuwait, and one hopes that will continue and that schemes like that of the Shatt-al-Arab will be carried out by British enterprise.

If permanent co-operation is to be achieved it is essential that foreign enterprise shall associate with local enterprise on a basis of equal partnership. Foreign companies must integrate themselves into the life of the community in which they operate. Western staff must study the language, ideas and customs of the people among whom they live and work. They must shed all attitude of racial, social or cultural superiority and, above all, get to understand the other fellow's point of view. They must link their fortunes with those of the local people serving a common aim with an identity of purpose. Thus only can a permanent association be maintained.

Mr. Lange: Kuwait has always been since ancient times one of the important points for the pearl industry in the Persian Gulf. I have recently read that pearl divers are no longer interested in this ancient trade but are turning over to the oil industry, because they say they can earn better pay. Could the lecturer say whether that is actually the case?

Mr. de Candole: That is certainly the case. I was interested in pearling, having read a good deal about it. This summer when in Kuwait, knowing the pearling season was about to open, I made contact with some of the old dhow captains, the old sailors who used to sail out to the pearling banks, as some still do. They told me that there is practically no pearling now because anybody can get a good job without having to risk his life in pearling. I do not think half a dozen of the small boats went out this year to the pearl banks which lie further south from Kuwait. Regrettable, but it is part of the change taking place there. The old crafts and association with the sea are gradually declining and not only the oil industry but all that comes from the money which flows from the industry is taking the major place.

Mr. WHITTERON: Apart from the natural growth of population an increase must have resulted from the very large influx because of the various developments taking place. Can the lecturer indicate what has been the change of population and whether that has had a substantial effect on the import of materials, seeing that so little is produced in the area?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: Obviously the population has greatly increased since 1946 when oil started to flow. Figures are always misleading because in any Arab country there is no census and owing to local feeling in that regard it is not possible to take a census. I had seen a figure of about 50,000 to 60,000 Kuwaitis pre-war. The estimates I was given for last year gave a population of 200,000 or more. From what I was able to see I should estimate something under 200,000 would be more accurate, but certainly something in that neighbourhood. A tremendous proportion of the increase includes those who have been attracted by these large schemes—Arabs from other parts of the Persian Gulf, from Iraq and neighbouring countries; a good many Persians also.

In regard to materials, had the questioner in mind the cost of living or supplies being adequate?

Mr. WHITTERON: I was thinking of supplies and a probable increase in the cost of living.

Mr. DE CANDOLE: Food supplies seem to be quite adequate. Sea trade is considerable; most of the food comes in by sea. From Australia, wheat, flour and so on. There does not seem to be any particular shortage. The cost of living seems higher than in some other Arab countries I have known, but not all that much higher. I would not say it is exaggerated out of all normal proportion.

Lord BIRDWOOD: In the past I believe the pipeline of fresh water for Kuwait from the Shatt al-Arab was held up because of difficulties with Iraq. What are the present relations?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: Present relations appear to be satisfactory on that particular issue, because I was told that an agreement had been achieved in principle with the Iraq Government for the pipeline. As far as I know there has been no snag since then.

Mr. LAW: Can the lecturer tell us whether the old indigenous method of building dhows is still indulged in or whether that is all mechanized now?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: The old methods are employed as far as I know in boat-building. Wandering along the shore at Kuwait one sees them building the dhows in the old fashion. The Sheikh and some of his relations are very keen sailors; keen on the sea. The latest boat which the Sheikh is having built he insists should be built at Kuwait by the local boat-builders in old dhow fashion; then he expects it to be equipped with the most modern and powerful engine so as to do about 35 knots.

Brigadier S. H. LONGRIGG: The relations between Kuwait and Iraq have been touched on. In 1938 King Ghazi had a private transmitting station in his palace in Baghdad and repeatedly demanded Kuwait itself as an integral part of Iraq. It was rather a strange method of conducting national propaganda, but the demand has persisted and today it is commonplace among Iraqi extremists that Kuwait, in fact, belongs to Iraq because in Turkish times it was an outlying and semi-detached nominal part of the country. There is also a point, not raised by the lecturer, in connection with Kuwait's old resources; besides its position as an entrepôt it really lived by smuggling into Iraq. This was a widespread and serious industry, and attracted a good deal of enterprise among the Kuwaitis very much more profitable than any other activity throughout the 1930s and before. It was carried on very vigorously and there were repeated clashes between the armed forces of the two countries, relations being as bad as could be; the British with some difficulty held them apart. I wonder whether the lecturer would comment on the smuggling trade, which is actually a very serious trade and a somewhat provocative type of enterprise? Would he tell us whether it still persists and whether it still has its bad effects?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: Brigadier Longrigg's knowledge of this question is so much greater than mine that I do not feel qualified to add to what he has said. It is most interesting because although I knew that in the past Kuwait's prosperity owed a good deal to the skill with which the Kuwaitis managed to induce traders to by-pass the Turkish Customs House at Basra, I had not realized that that had gone on in such comparatively recent times. It helps to explain the prosperity of Kuwait before oil came along. It was far more prosperous than people usually imagined it to be. They looked upon Kuwait as a miserable huddle of squalid houses before oil came, and that then it was suddenly transformed into a magnificent town. I gather from what the Sheikh and others have told me that it was always a very prosperous little town, but the Kuwaitis were not very informative about the question of smuggling. Probably it has now ceased.

Mr. HAMILTON: What, sir, is the revenue from oil, approximately, in Kuwait compared to Iraq?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: If the speaker has in mind the amount of money the Sheikh receives as his share under the 50-50 agreement, I am not acquainted with the exact figure. I believe in 1953 it was somewhere in the region of £50 to £60 million. The Iraq figure from oil may be round about the same. I do not think it is far behind, because Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia all run fairly closely in oil production and they are all run on similar agreements, which means their revenue from oil should be fairly even. I do not know the figures for Iraq.

Mr. TRIMMER: In the relatively near future it is conceivable that the revenue of £60 million may rise to £80 million or £90 million a year. With the completion of the social development schemes about which we have been hearing, have the Kuwaitis thought of agricultural development, or even of the export of capital to other areas?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: The industrial and agricultural development has been given a tremendous amount of attention. It is a difficult problem because the country has no natural resources other than oil. It has no tradition of manufacture or anything of that nature, like most Arab places. It is difficult to build up any industrial economy, but various projects are under consideration for making prefabricated materials, perhaps cement, bricks and so on, though personally I do not see very much future for that activity. It seems, as Brigadier Longrigg said, that Kuwait in the past has been an entrepôt for trading and that it will be the same in the future, apart from the oil. There is its position in the pearling industry also. It is a very good port, well situated. I think that will be Kuwait's future rather than industrial. Agriculture, again, from what I saw does not look very promising, although the Shatt al-Arab scheme will provide an opportunity to get cultivation in a big way.

As regards exporting capital, I assume that the speaker was referring to investment. It is well known that the Sheikh has assigned a part of the large oil revenue for investment in Great Britain. As far as I know that is still proceeding. It might be something like 30 per cent. of a year's revenue from oil; another 30 per cent. might go to development and the rest for current expenditure. As far as I know, that is the only investment that has yet been decided on. There are a number of people who would like the Sheikh to invest money; I think he is being very careful.

Professor TRITTON: Popular report says that a good deal of money has been invested by Kuwait in the United States. What does Mr. de Candole say about that?

Mr. DE CANDOLE: I do not know the details of the Sheikh's investments; in view of the fact that he has very good connection with the United States as well as with Britain—after all, the company which is operating his oil is an Anglo-American company—he may feel it good not to have all the eggs in one basket.

Asked by a lady MEMBER whether the Arab refugees received any help from the Government,

Mr. DE CANDOLE replied: The Sheikh has given large sums of money to many deserving causes in the Middle East, but in the case of his contribution towards the general question of Arab refugees he is being very cautious, because all the Arab countries have a policy in this regard and he cannot get out of step with the rest of them. That is very well known. It is a large question which there is no time to deal with today. There has been a useful contribution in the employment that Kuwait has offered to a very large number of refugees. There are a large number of Palestinians employed in the Government and in business and other employment available; they are encouraged to come to Kuwait and given every facility and paid good wages when employed. I regard that as a very good contribution to the Arab refugee problem.

The CHAIRMAN: Our time is up. We have listened to an extremely interesting lecture, followed by very helpful questions. It remains for me, on your behalf, to thank Mr. de Candole very much indeed for coming and talking to us and showing us the slides.

The vote of thanks was carried with acclamation and the meeting concluded.