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SOUTH-EAST ASIA

By SIR ANGUS GILLAN, K.B.E., C.M.G.

Anniversary Lecture delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society on June 5, 1952, the President, General Sir John Shea, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., in the chair.

The PRESIDENT said: We are very fortunate in having with us Sir Angus Gillan, who has had a most distinguished career first as an athlete and then as a civil servant and in working for the British Council. Sir Angus rowed twice for Oxford, in 1907 and in 1909, and if I remember aright he was a member of the winning Olympic Leander crew in 1912. He was later unanimously selected for the Sudan Civil Service, where he became in later years Governor of Kordofan and the Civil Secretary to the Sudan.

In 1941 Sir Angus was in charge of the Empire and Commonwealth Division of the British Council, and during that period he was a valued member of the Council of our Society. He resigned from the Council in 1949 to spend two eventful years in Australia in charge of the work of the British Council there. He has recently returned and will lecture now on the attitude of Australia towards Asia in general and particularly towards South-east Asia.

THE title which I have had the temerity to give to this lecture, "Australia's Mission in South-east Asia," might cover a large number of aspects—diplomacy, defence, commerce, economics, social welfare and so on, but I am going to devote most of my attention to what we call cultural relations.

I make no apology for that. It is the job on which I was engaged directly on the United Kingdom side—the projection, in some form, of Britain in Australia; but indirectly it also brought me into fairly close contact with what Australia is doing and what I hope Australia will more and more do on similar lines. Furthermore, I believe that cultural relations are, in a way, the most fundamental of all relations. Are you sceptical about that? "Cultural relations" is a horrid jargon term and as such is apt to be rather suspect; but, as I have preached for ten years in the British Council, I believe cultural relations are simply the mechanics of human relations, a way of trying to get to know each other better and, consequently, understanding each other better and, one hopes, by that process, getting to like each other better. Cultural relations are, in fact, an essential link in mutual human understanding. We can all do better business, or do better whatever we are engaged in, if we can understand the other man's point of view, his outlook on life, his way of life; and, conversely, if he can understand ours. As with the individual, so I believe it is with nations.

Perhaps I had better begin by saying something as to how I got mixed up in this business of Australia and South-east Asia. As the President has told you, a short time after I retired from service in the Sudan I was asked to join the British Council to build up its work in the Commonwealth and Empire. The Colonial side was intensely interesting and pretty straightforward, very largely thanks to the encouragement and help which we received from the Colonial Office. The Commonwealth side was,

perhaps, not quite so straightforward. I would not for a moment say it was sticky, but it was certainly a little tricky. It was a new idea to some extent both in Whitehall and on the periphery, so that one had to proceed rather slowly. There were many disappointments and a not inconsiderable number of headaches.

Then in the autumn of 1944 Lord Bruce, or Mr. Bruce as he then was, asked me to go to see him. That is nearly eight years ago and so I cannot perhaps quote exactly the words he used, but I have still a very vivid recollection of the conversation we then had. The gist of it was something like this. He said: "I have come to the conclusion that the sooner the British Council is represented in Australia, the better." I was naturally gratified, as other tentative approaches to Australia had not produced much in the way of result, and I asked him "Just why?" "Well," he replied, "Australia is just beginning to grasp that she has graduated into full nationhood. She is going to have a tremendous job after the war, which she does not yet fully realize, in the South-west Pacific and in South-east Asia. A great part of its effectiveness will depend on the cultural relations which she builds up. But she is a young country without [his words, not mine] much cultural background. It is for the British Council to show her how this part of the job is to be done."

That was something of a challenge. The upshot was that I did an exploratory tour in Australia, and, incidentally, in New Zealand, in the first half of 1945. It would be irrelevant now to speak of the keen interest in and appreciation of the more obvious elements of what I had to offer—the various projections of Britain which the British Council is (or ought to be if only it had the funds) in a position to supply. There was also a very keen interest (though it was a much newer idea) in what I used to describe to Australians as a two-way traffic: a reciprocal traffic in ideas between Britain and Australia. But when it came to talking about Australia's mission in South-east Asia, not only had one to walk delicately as an outsider, but one was up against another difficulty. Australians were at that time fighting in South-east Asia. At an earlier period in the war invasion from that quarter had seemed a very definite danger. There was, therefore, no lack of "war" interest in South-east Asia. Nevertheless, at the same time in most circles there seemed to me to be only the very dimmest, if any, perception that Australia would or should have a peace-time rôle to play there. When one developed this part of the thesis one felt that people, though too polite to say so, were thinking: "What is this chap driving at?"

As far as I am concerned, let me now jump four and a half years to the time when I decided that before retiring I must have a breath of fresh air, and I exchanged my job as Controller of the British Council's Commonwealth and Empire Division for that of its representative in Australia.

Now, as a cultural representative of Britain, I know well that I have many shortcomings and deficiencies. If I have any trade it is just that of the plain administrator. I have no pretensions to higher culture in any direction and I am all too frequently stumped when people expect me, as they often do, to have an intimate knowledge of their own particular interest, whether it be music, drama, art, science, education or what-not.

But it happened that in those four and a half years I had made two tours in South-east Asia, and although two tours do not make one an expert, I was able to talk with some knowledge about South-east Asia and Australia's opportunities and responsibilities in that area.

When I arrived in Australia in October, 1949, I found many encouraging changes in the position *vis-à-vis* South-east Asia, certainly in Government circles and to a limited extent in some others. Relevant, of course, both in cause and effect, had been the Anzac Pact, now expanded into the Pacific Pact. There had been Dr. Evatt's insistence on the reference of the Indonesian problem to the United Nations. There was the creation of the South Pacific Commission, largely on the initiative of Australia and New Zealand. Incidentally, Australia pays twice as much as any other Power towards the expense of that Commission. Post-war responsibilities for reconstruction in New Guinea and Papua, of which I had the good fortune to see something while I was there, had caused eyes to turn in that direction. A School of Pacific Administration was in process of being set up in Sydney. In fact, in current phrase, what, on the United Kingdom pattern, had, until the war, been called traditionally but inaccurately "the Far East" was becoming recognized in its proper position as the Near North. And then in 1950, largely at the instigation of Mr. (today Sir Percy) Spender, came the Colombo Conference and the initiation of the Colombo Plan.

I do not wish to weary you with a lot of statistical details, but I must give a few about the Colombo Plan, because it seems that the part Australia is playing is not fully appreciated in the United Kingdom. Let me read one or two short extracts from the Report of the Consultative Committee on Economic Development in South and South-east Asia (pp. 54-6) which was presented to Parliament only last month. Under the heading "Australia" the Report says:

"6. In accordance with its active and enthusiastic support for the objectives of the Colombo Plan the Australian Government announced in December, 1950, that it would contribute £A.31.25 million to economic development over the six-year period of the Colombo Plan. The Australian Government had already agreed to contribute 35 per cent. of any total up to £8 million (Sterling) to the Technical Co-operation Programme over a period of three years.

#### *Economic Development Programme*

7. During the first year of the Plan £A.8.75 million was made available for economic development. India was allocated £A.4.2 million, Pakistan £A.2 million and Ceylon £A.0.3 million, leaving a balance of £A.2.25 million unallocated. The arrangements for the expenditure of the first year's allocation were set forth in notes exchanged on September 24, 1951, with each of the Governments concerned. The main provisions were that aid to the recipient countries should, so far as possible, be in the form of Australian commodities, materials, equipment and facilities which would be mutually agreed upon, and that these supplies and any local currency proceeds

resulting from the sale thereof would be used by the recipient Government in the manner contributing towards the achievement of the objectives of the Colombo Plan for Economic Development."

Then as regards the

*"Technical Co-operation Programme*

9. On the basis of present contributions to the Technical Co-operation Programme the Australian Government is committed to a contribution of approximately £A.3.1 million which will be expanded in four main fields—namely, fellowships and scholarships, special schools and seminars, provision of experts and technical equipment.

10. In December, 1950, the Australian Government offered 150 fellowships and scholarships to the countries of South and South-east Asia and in September, 1951, a further 150 were offered. Senior Fellows, Junior Fellows and Scholars have undertaken courses of training, the duration of which has varied between six months and six years, in a wide number of subjects, including economics, medicine, agricultural science, mechanical and electrical engineering, plant chemistry, road construction and maintenance, civil aviation, meteorology, statistics, telecommunications, nursing, sheep husbandry and textile production."

I was told recently that the number of Colombo Plan scholars now in Australia is 500.

"11. In addition to the regular fellowships and scholarships programme, Australia has arranged special schools and seminars for selected groups. A course in public administration for twenty-four Pakistan civil servants and a seminar in social services for four students from Ceylon and four from India have been conducted. A number of short-term visits to Australia was made by officials of recipient countries to observe Australian methods and procedures. Up to February 1, 1952, Australia had provided sixteen experts to India, Pakistan and Ceylon in the fields of fisheries, technical education, brick and tile manufacture, educational psychology, monetary economics, agricultural development, food technology, geological survey, aerial pest control, and control of fruit tree diseases."

Then in the paragraph dealing with "*Administration*" the Report says :

"15. To implement the Australian programmes under the Colombo Plan the Australian Government has established an Economic and Technical Assistance Section in the Department of External Affairs. In addition a Director of Colombo Plan Supplies has been appointed to expedite the procurement of supplies against contributions in the light of requests from recipient governments and Australian availabilities. It is anticipated that this appointment will mean a more speedy response to requests for supplies, a more thorough

assessment of Australian capacity to supply and a better organized Australian programme generally in the field of economic development, supplies and technical equipment."

I think you will agree that that is a pretty solid contribution to the material well-being of South-east Asia or of Asia generally. You will note that the Colombo Plan covers, so to speak, both export and import. Under it Australia is sending out aid, financial and technical, to various countries of South-east Asia. She is also giving increased opportunities *in* Australia for study by scholars from these countries.

Now, how does this latter square with what has been called (though it is not an official term) the White Australia policy? There is a good deal of misunderstanding about that policy into which it is not my business to go this evening—except perhaps to emphasize that even if Australia were to open her doors indiscriminately to Asiatic immigration the effect on Asia would be no more noticeable than would be an attempt to drain off a Mississippi flood with a 6-inch pipe. But there is one aspect I must mention which greatly interested me. On my way to Australia in 1949 I stopped off at Singapore and also saw a little of Malaya and Indonesia. Being bound for Australia and interested in South-east Asian affairs, I naturally tried to ascertain what the feeling was in regard to the so-called White Australian policy. I found practically no criticism of Australian policy as such. It may be ironical, but the wave of nationalism which has spread and is spreading over these countries at least seemed to me to have this logical application: that people were prepared to admit that even Australia had the right to say whom she wanted and whom she did not want as her nationals. As far as I could discover it was simply the method of application of the policy in some individual cases which called forth such very bitter criticism; but it was criticism which I heard very nearly as strongly expressed in Australia.

On the other hand, when I said I was going to Australia I was impressed by the interest shown in her and the wish for more knowledge of her. "Why," I was asked time after time, "does Australia not send us more films, lecturers, books, and so on? Can't you do something about it?" I certainly tried to do something.

But to return to the question of the admission of Asiatics; I believe, and I think an increasing number of Australians is coming to believe, that quite apart from any moral obligation, the way of safety also lies in the encouragement of Asiatic students to come to Australia to study. These young people will be going back to their own countries as potential leaders of their people. If they can go back with friendly feelings towards Australia, realizing that they have gained much from her and that their fellow-nationals will have, as students, a great deal to gain from her, I feel fairly certain that they will help to mould public opinion in such a way as to lessen the fear and the threat of mass invasion.

Of course the inculcation of this attitude of mind depends not only on the admission of Asiatic students to the schools and universities and technical colleges in Australia, but also on their treatment while there. It is a comparatively new problem in Australia. We have had it much

longer in this country and we still realize what a difficult problem it is and that we have not finally solved it. There is in Australia a great and natural fear of the Asiatic, if allowed in in quantity, undercutting the wage market and reducing the general standard of living. But I do not feel that there is much colour prejudice as such in Australia—certainly not more than still lingers in Britain, perhaps less. It is the newness of the problem, the ignorance in many quarters of its very existence, and the consequent lack of machinery to deal with it, to which more attention should be directed. But governments, the universities, various small but enthusiastic societies and some of the churches are beginning to tackle the problem in human terms. The Department of External Affairs has recently appointed a full-time experienced welfare officer to deal with the human problems of the Colombo Plan trainees. Melbourne University has appointed a warden of Asiatic students and is going to build an International House where students from outside countries and Australian students can live together, get to know each other and discuss their mutual problems. I doubt whether coloured students could find anywhere more congenial surroundings than in the lovely and friendly University of Western Australia at Perth. And I happened to find an obviously happy band of Malays in one of the Adelaide colleges. This process is all going in the right direction, but I venture to think it still needs more guidance, more co-ordination and drive. And of course—I hope it is “of course”—in view of the various advantages Australia has of climate, accessibility and so on, the number of Asiatic students is bound to increase just as fast as the schools and technical colleges, which are at present just as overcrowded as our own, can take them in, whether as assisted scholars or on their own resources.

Concurrently (and this touches on what I called the export side) there is and is going to be a tremendous demand from all this area for the things of the mind and spirit as well as of material things—teachers, lecturers, missionaries, books, films, projections of the arts. I believe the great majority want them in the English tongue and in the British—I use the word in the widest sense—interpretation. But the demand will not last for ever unless met. There is an enormous field to cover and time is short. I doubt if Britain in these hard days can cover the whole of the field—and indeed, as I often said when in Australia, why should she? Australia is becoming more and more the bastion of democracy in the South-west Pacific. She surely has a very big stake in the peace, prosperity and social welfare of the peoples of South-east Asia. Some of the area consists of British colonies and dependencies. One might hear it said (and it is true enough in theory) that they are therefore Britain's responsibility; but is not that doctrine, in practice, a little out of date in the interdependent world of today? (As a matter of fact, I never heard the argument used as an escape clause in Australia.) And, anyhow, they are not all British colonies. There are other autonomous dominions wanting help. There are foreign countries like Burma and Indonesia. An unfriendly Indonesia—let alone a Communist one—with its 70 million people is not only going to be a menace to the 8 million in adjacent British colonies and dependencies, but will not be a very pleasant neigh-

bour for the 8 million in Australia. I am not suggesting a policy of appeasement in the face of the more stupid of Indonesia's adolescent exuberances. But there is a great difference between appeasement and holding out a friendly hand—and friendly relations based on mutual understanding may well obviate the painful necessity of making a choice between appeasement and force.

It is clear, then, that in many respects Australia is really beginning to appreciate the responsibilities and opportunities of her position *vis-à-vis* South-east Asia. Consider her prompt response in the shape of military aid in Malaya and Korea. In the economic and social welfare spheres her share in the Colombo Plan is, as I have shown, evidence of her practical interest. And on a smaller scale I came across rather a curious little helping hand which was held out. I happened to be reading the British North Borneo Report of, I think, 1949, which recorded a gift by Australia of £A.3,500 for the purchase of books and visual material for schools and libraries in the reconstruction of that much devastated and remote little colony. I do not suppose that one Australian in 10,000 knew that that had been done, but it is a pointer as well as being a light under a bushel. But there is so much more to be done. I would like to see more Australian professors in the universities of the East; more teachers in the schools and technical colleges. I was told often that Australia herself is short of teachers. I am afraid I retorted that we are just as short, or shorter. I would like to see Australia sending to the East repertory companies, musicians, a far more plentiful supply of books, films, art exhibitions and so on.

While I was in Australia the Robert Masters Quartette paid a visit there under the auspices of the British Council. I happened to know—I think it was a surprise to many—that there is a very keen interest in Western music among the people in Singapore and Malaya and, I believe, in other parts of the area. As soon as I heard that the visit of the quartette to Australia was definitely being arranged I wrote urgently to London asking that the opportunity should be taken to let the quartette stop off at Singapore and play wherever they could. They played in Singapore and flew to Kuala Lumpur and played there under military guard, which was all they could do in the circumstances. But I wish you could have heard their description of their reception. They said it was the most intensely interesting incident in their whole military career, playing to audiences, 90 per cent. Malaya and Chinese, taking a really keen and intelligent interest in what they were hearing. It was very fortunate that at no great additional expense the British Council was able to send the quartette round that way; but normally, of course, it would cost very much less to send an orchestra or repertory company to Singapore from Sydney than to send one from London; and all such things would be evidence of goodwill and would, I feel, help to promote mutual understanding. It wants organization. It wants a little money and, of course, that postulates a solid backing of public opinion, because, though I am convinced that it would pay good dividends, such an investment is one of which Treasuries and many politicians fight shy.

“It is strange,” wrote Commander King-Hall recently, “that we



democrats who are supposed to be the champions of the idea that mind is more important than matter, who are supposed to understand that at bottom this world-struggle is a conflict between right and wrong and therefore a spiritual and ideological issue, are yet less aware of the importance of ideas than are our opponents, whose creed is based on a materialistic conception of man and his aspirations." It is, indeed, strange, and it is surely time that the facile theory that Communism breeds only on poverty and hunger was debunked. Of course it breeds on the exploitation of poverty and hunger; but we are not going to defeat Communism by supplying food and clothing alone any more than by military weapons alone. Perhaps it will be left for Australia to take a more realistic view than is evident in many circles in this country and to remember, in the words of Mr. Winston Churchill, that "while moral force is, unhappily, no substitute for armed force, it is a very great reinforcement."

I had an interesting instance of the awakening of public opinion just before I left Australia. The Adult Education Department of the University of Western Australia kindly organized a tour for me in that lovely country, famous for its forests of Jarrah and Karri, in the south of Western Australia. It was well worth doing at the price of a series of lectures, and in point of fact I had to repeat only one lecture over and over again. I sent round a list of subjects on which I felt more or less competent to speak and all the organizations concerned chose one which I had entitled "South-east Asia and the Cultural Weapon in Democratic Defence." I do not think it unfair to say that none of these remote communities would have understood the meaning of that title two or three years earlier.

My job as British Council representative in Australia was, of course, primarily that of a sort of cultural broker for Britain; but, as I said, a one-way traffic, whether in commerce or ideas, is surely not enough, and I think I spent as much time in Australia in trying to persuade Australians themselves (with what success remains to be seen) to take more hand in the game to try to make Australia and her ideas better known overseas. I often used to tell the Australians that they are much too modest; that created considerable surprise on their part, because they are not often accused of modesty. And of course we know all about their cricketers, to our cost; also to our cost we know—and I think as some Australians are realizing in the long run to their own cost—about their recent wool prices. Droughts and floods we also hear about, and also jockeys and boxers. But Australia has so much to offer of which she tells us nothing—indeed, of which she hardly knows herself. I stressed on every possible opportunity that there are, in particular, two fields in which the need for self-expression is urgent. The first of these is Britain, but it would be irrelevant to speak of that now. As to the other field, perhaps I may quote from what I said in my farewell broadcast to Australia:

"And the other field—this is my King Charles's head, but I cannot help that; it is so vitally important—the other field, of course, is South-east Asia. I know you are beginning to do something—the Colombo Plan is evidence of that—but there is so much more to be done in spreading a knowledge of our British way of life and creating a better mutual

understanding in that part of the world which modern communications are every day bringing nearer to your doorstep—whether you like it or not. Britain has done a lot, but she can't do it all. Do you remember an entry in the log of *Sirius*, written in 1787, describing her departure from the Cape on the last leg of her long voyage to Australia? I have quoted it before, but it is worth quoting again because it is so apposite. 'We weighed anchor, and soon left far behind every scene of civilization and humanized manners, to explore a remote and barbarous land, and plant in it these happy arts which alone constitute the pre-eminence and dignity of other countries.' 'These happy arts'—it's a good phrase, and I think we can interpret it to include the whole art of living—our way of life. Britain planted these arts in Australia. For a hundred and sixty years Britons, now become good Australians, have cultivated these arts, adapting them to their own needs, painting them in their own shades, giving them their own interpretation, but never forgetting that they are part of a common heritage. Is it not for us, together, to work to give the fruits of this heritage to others who are today searching feverishly, uncertainly, for the good life? There is another competitor in the field, strong, ruthless, plausible, who seeks, whether by force or fraud, to enmesh them, body and soul, in the toils of slavery. If we who bear the flag of freedom do not march breast forward it may soon be too late."

A prominent Chinese citizen of Hong Kong at the inauguration of the new Municipal Council referred to it as "a virgin field pregnant with opportunities for exploitation." That picturesque, if somewhat mixed, metaphorical phrase might well be applied to South-east Asia today. The child of pre-war years has bloomed into adolescence and stands at the parting of the ways. Who is going to exploit her and to what end? Are we going to stand aside and let her fall victim, whether by rape or seduction, to fill a place in the harem of the Communist tyrant? Or are we going to help her stand on her own feet, to take her own place in the free world, giving her the chance of finding her own destiny, but putting at her disposal, to use as she may see fit, all the contributions which Western civilization and democracy have made to mankind?

I suggest that in this endeavour there are in particular three countries which have a common task, a task the successful fulfilment of which will mark a real and vital contribution to world peace. Look at this map of the world centred on South-east Asia. It is more expressive of realities today than the usual one centred on Britain. In the north sits the Communist tyrant leering lecherously at his would-be victim. On the periphery, in a triangle—or is it the omen of the V-sign?—lie the three powers best able to protect her integrity. May I with due reverence paraphrase an earlier message of fundamental truth? Now abide Britain, the United States of America and Australia—these three—and the nearest of these is Australia.

The meeting closed with votes of thanks to the President and the Lecturer.

