

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Inside the various branches of the Bodleian Library, especially at Rhodes House where there are volumes concerned mainly with Empire and Commonwealth affairs, a number of Colonial Service officers bend over books and strain their eyes alongside the more indigenous species of Oxford scholars. Gathered at the University from the colonies and protectorates, these officers spend brief tours assigned to colleges, presumably to obtain a more objective, stratospheric view of the big organism which they routinely serve as outer appendages. They attend lectures by professors of history, economics, politics, and anthropology; they read lengthily of government reports, white papers, and other research material which considerations of time and availability had denied them while actually on the job. They also discuss in small class groups the problems of local and central government, of native education, of proposed native participation in government, and, above all, the general future of the Commonwealth.

The officers are not all scholarly-appearing types, and the greater number seem to go out of their way to make sure they shall not be identified with the general mass of graduate students. They are perhaps more conscious than any other sect at Oxford of the conflict between the Academic and the Practical sides of government and politics.

Because of the other myriad types of service age who crowd the graduate facilities of the University it is difficult to identify a Colonial Service officer at first glance. But physical appearance does afford a basis for a good guess. Sometimes there is a shade of tan, faint and residual after weeks in the dim English winter. Sometimes there is a yellowness from jaundice or from atabrine dosage. Generally there is a military bearing and stride since many of the current crop were recruited from the military at the end of the war. In rare instances the identifying clue might be a mark of tropical ill-health: the spotty baldness of fungus infection or fever, the poor color of amebic or bacillary dysentery. But more often the reverse is true; the Colonial Service officer, largely with a background of enforced outdoor life in areas where food rationing is negligible, looks in better health than the stay-at-home Englishman. And with higher salaries and tax-exemption privileges they own automobiles and dress less austere.

While the ordinary graduate student at Oxford tends to attempt to widen his circle of acquaintances broadly the Colonial Service group remains, generally, a social entity in itself. Officers and their wives tend to make or renew friendships with others from their same colonial areas and, on occasions, with Colonial Service people at large, but it is rare for their members to deliberately seek relations with Oxford residents outside. This may or may not be associated with the "practical vs. the Academic" argument.

The Colonial Service Club, conveniently situated near Rhodes House, provides a center for activity and a bachelor quarters for a portion of the officers. There is a dining room, a lounge and bar where drinks are sold at sub-popular prices, and a small library of important books and documents. The bar-lounge conversation before dinner lacks the sparkling wit so standard with dons over cocktails, but it is easier to get a word in edgewise, and all jokes are funny. The subjects of greatest interest and the level of humor are those you would expect with a group of American business men or army officers. A fair---by no means excessive---amount is drunk and it is very well held. At dances given by the Club, where tails are the rule and black ties the exception, much larger amounts are consumed, still well-held.

This group of people, which I have thought attractive and likable from the beginning, may or may not be representative of the rest of the Colonial Service. The best information here seems to indicate that they are, and that their opinions, candidly expressed, could provide a basis for explaining or ascertaining any general attitudes of the Service personnel, entire. At this stage in my accretion of facts it seems that the opinions of Colonial Service personnel on general Commonwealth issues could be very important, especially at this generally District Officer level. As I understand it now the District Officer is the key instrument in the application of Colonial policy; he has in many districts broad discretionary powers, and I can see how apathy or intransigence on his part could sabotage or pervert intentions from higher up.

Through listening to the reading of class papers, class discussions, and informal conversation among officers I have heard enough to make me feel able to comment on the attitudes evinced. Perhaps it will be of interest to you for me to list four headings---general problems concerning the British today---and tell you how I think my Colonial Service classmates feel about each one.

1. Regarding the Future Integrity of the Commonwealth:

The attitude here seems to be one of traditional faith, sometimes rather hidden by superficial cynicism and even expressions of defeatism. Officers are quick to admit the loss of the old factor of British military power which could hold an Empire inside a single security system. That today Russian land power overlooks

Europe while American naval power fills the Pacific, they fully realize, is a situation which exerts a strong influence against continued Commonwealth unity. Australia and Canada now look to the United States for protection, and India's actions are cramped by her location on the perimeter of Soviet expansion. The dual result---a decline in Commonwealth interdependence accompanied by a heavy increase in the obligations of member states to powerful nations outside the Commonwealth---they also concede, bids well to make Commonwealth unity contingent upon continued world peace and a favorable world economic atmosphere.

The existence of the United Nations and regional or "bloc" alliances such as those formed by the Atlantic Pact also encroaches upon Commonwealth functions of security and economic cooperation, and tends to weaken Commonwealth bonds in proportion. The Commonwealth nations now members of such outside organizations tend to be drawn away from the family.

My classmates next enumerate the internal centrifugal influences, which are older and perhaps stronger than external forces. They go into the difficult problems of uniting a multi-cultural, multi-racial, and geographically scattered portion of the world population into an effective cooperative. They discuss the issue of their own "cultural unfitness" for the task, citing the psychological obstacles to union which arise, inevitably, when the unifier insists on retaining his own cultural and ethnic purity, refusing to alter his own social mores or to intermarry freely with associated races.

But, after they have thus painted a complete picture of defeat, my friends rebound with characteristic British aplomb and turn the canvas backside. All of these are disadvantages, they say, but they are not wholly unmitigated. The rise of American and Soviet power may have forced Commonwealth nations into junior partnerships on a regional security basis, but it has also demonstrated (through attendant unpleasant contact with U. S. and U. S. S. R. military factions) how very little regard these powerful nations actually have for the feelings of weak neighbors. The emergence of the United Nations and the Atlantic Alliance, they continue, also had a reverse cutting edge. The UN proved itself an arena of power politics, where it soon became evident that the weaker nations were likely to be trodden and torn in the struggle of the two giants. Such relationships, the story goes on, have provided lessons in the value of remaining in the Commonwealth family, as against going out into the cold world alone. The backside of the canvas portrays a family group, sundered for a while by understandable reaction against stern parental authority, but now reunited on a basis of improved equality.

This is the way they feel, and these are the hopes they seem to cherish. They go on to support the thesis with arguments expressed in everything from blunt, economic statistics to mystical patriotic expressions about Drake's drum. If I had to make a guess now I'd say they sounded very convincing. It will be interesting to see how well the impression stands after I get to the

grass roots.

2. Regarding the Problems of a Multi-Racial Society:

Here again my classmates admit the enormity of the Commonwealth task; and again they freely confess the unfitness of England for her role of non-partisan moderator and uniting agency. They appreciate fully, they claim, the apparent incompatibility of various ethnic groups (often geographically and economically juxtaposed) among whom they plan to foster increasing cooperation. They cite the economically disadvantageous Hindu-Moslim partition of India and the recent racial disturbances in Africa between Indians and natives as ostensible proof of this basic incompatibility. But at this point they turn, and advance a series of relative-type arguments intended to (1) underline the words "apparent" and "ostensible" and (2) to state firmly that though England is poorly equipped as a moderator and unifier she is at least as well equipped as any other nation---especially so in view of her long experience in colonial administration and general diplomacy. (The logical deduction is that this essential world task must therefore be performed by England, or through the disastrous experience of another world war, or not at all; and from this the British civil servant in the colonies can derive an emotional incentive. If the task of union is successfully completed the result will be an effective Commonwealth organization, embracing many races and many religions; and a basis might be provided for an enduring world peace and an eventual World Order.)

There is a point of pride in the knowledge that the British government has studied heavily of native cultures, employed social anthropologists to observe tribal custom and law, assigned experts in administration to appraise the anthropologists' findings and to suggest what institutions of British government might be applied. This is backed up by a history of achievement by British scientists and engineers in improving the general health and productivity of colonial areas. The Colonial Service officer believes the experience so gained to be valuable, at least in that it has provided a store of knowledge of concerned ethnic groups and their sub-societies which is superior to that of any other nation today. He thinks this knowledge, despite its obtainance during a period of repugnant authoritarian control, provides the only logical means of ameliorating current racial tensions.

Having heard these serious expressions, I am now inclined to pay less attention to the surface attitudes of cynicism and defeatism. In relative terms---the only terms that have meaning to the astute Britisher---the overall view of the multi-racial problem is not without a leaven of hope. And I am not here referring to the traditional British faith that their policy will always, eventually, muddle through. They are holding this in reserve, to fall back on whenever the Moslims, Hindus, Natives and Kenya settlers may begin killing each other wholesale.

3. Regarding the Conflict of Democracy versus Efficiency:

There seems no doubt in the average district officer's mind that this conflict does exist, at least in the short run view of the colonies. The introduction of Western democratic ideas of humanitarianism and individual rights has automatically sacrificed a measure of efficiency in an immediate materialistic sense, and rendered the task of the administrator more difficult. In many districts, of course, it is confessed that the old authoritarian methods still obtain behind a democratic facade. This admits a measure of hypocrisy in government and administration and seems generally regarded as unhealthy; but it has become so institutionalized in parts of Africa that officers regard the matter as touchy, and refrain from discussing it except in a vaguely defensive vein.

Officers often complain that the Government, and not their local administrations, is the two-faced party. Its policies often give lip-service to humanitarian ideals, but just as often (under the pressure of England's current economic "survival" program) it demands a quota of economic production from a given colonial area which cannot be achieved without recourse to arbitrary control over labor and other human factors.

In attempting to place the blame for this it is common for the colonial civil servant to go above the Colonial Office. He tends to blame the simplified political slogans of the Western World for the "well-intentioned but misguided humanitarianism" of British colonial policy. A Tanganyika district officer once put it something like this: "It's high time Government at the highest level realized that democracy and humanitarianism are privileges and luxuries for the economically fortunate and the educationally qualified peoples, and not inherent and inalienable rights for every human being. While we are faced with this economic crisis and need economic production it is obvious that we may have to secure it through autocratic, authoritarian, even inhumane methods. Democracy and Equality are worthy goals, and we must stride toward them as rapidly as possible, but at the same time we have to ensure immediate survival. We must help the native to be educated and responsible before we can hand him the dangerous and easily perverted institutions of democracy. And we must undertake this task with the realization that we will be delayed by immediate considerations of survival and security which will absorb much of our energy for years to come."

This is the old bitterness between the election-minded politician who makes the glowing campaign promises and the administrator who is required to put them into effect. The remedy which the consensus of my classmates would propose is one of education---not only of Africans but of British voters who tend to apply their own moral yardstick in endorsing the colonial policies of candidates. They feel that such a remedy is for the very distant future and that all participants and critics concerned should be extremely patient.

4. Regarding the "British Yoke" and the "Good Riddance" Concepts:

The discussion from which these impressions were drawn was initiated in Professor Wheare's class in federal government. A question was raised as to why England---since so many of her scholars and political experts were condemning the colonial areas as burdens and liabilities---did not follow the lead of the United States and wash her hands of the whole business by granting independence to her colonies.

The response was hurried and voluminous. First cited was the indispensibility of Empire and Commonwealth structures in the maintenance of world peace, and democracy. Such abandonment of the colonies would create power-vacuum areas all over the globe, and at the more strategic points the communists would undoubtedly move in. Secondly, Britain felt a moral responsibility for the continued political tutelage of her backward colonies so that they might eventually take places as members of the Commonwealth, or as independent democratic states outside. Finally, there was the need for markets for British industry, to facilitate British recovery through export programs. The creation of a sterling trade area was a grim necessity after the costs of the war.

Thus the retention of the colonies (where retention seemed at all feasible) was prompted by Security, Morality, and Economic Necessity. The instance of the U. S. and the Philippines provided no fair example since the U. S. was not under comparable pressures, and could carry out her own objectives of Security (after all, doesn't the American navy dominate the Pacific?) and Morality (aren't there strong cultural and economic ties with the new, independent nation?) and Economic well-being (no dollar shortage in America, is there?) without undue strain. The argument, in short, was that Britain had to maintain political control because her other ties were not strong enough.

I did not attempt to point out the self-contradiction in the light of the earlier argument that British administrative know-how would itself promote a bond of sympathy among the Commonwealth nations. If I had, a number of very lucid answers would have been given.

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My large impression is that these expressions of my classmates and friends were sincerely rendered. The Colonial Service officer, like any government employee, is likely to have his every thought tinctured with cynicism, doubt, and a certain mistrust of his governments' administrative efficiency. But behind it all is the feeling---a conviction, rather---that central and local government in England is the least corrupt in the world today, representing the best compromise between democratic form and efficient administrative function. While he may be annoyed with its plodding slowness and mistrustful of the immediate

party cabinet, the astute British civil servant feels obliged to admit that as governments go his is probably the least repugnant. From this appraisal he derives the nearest thing to a crusading spirit possible for an Englishman in time of peace, and tends to approach his task, of persuading or coercing other peoples into acceptance of his own political structures, with something more than indifference.

I am anxious to see how well these impressions will stand after I have discussed them with Mr. Severinghaus, and after I have associated for a few months with some district officers in their own back yards.

Sincerely,

John B. George

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