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Commonwealth Out of Empire

By MORITZ J. BONN

TO THE average American, imperialism is the exploitation of backward races by more advanced nations. Its visible incarnation is a high-booted, stupid Englishman wearing a pith helmet and kicking economically helpless but culturally superior natives. The noise made by some apostles of imperialism is responsible for this unattractive picture, but it owes wider popularity to Lenin, who defined imperialism as the last stage of capitalism.

Yet Czarist Russia, which was not even in the first stages of capitalism, conquered an empire, and the Soviets have taken over most of it. Before the German invasion, this empire comprised sixteen republics and 182 nationalities. Of these republics, five were annexed after Hitler attacked Poland in 1939. Russia's empire clearly proves that imperialism can exist under the aegis of a country whose leaders do not wear pith helmets and in which capitalism is a social crime.

Imperialism is simply the making and holding of an empire, a composite state in which people of diverse origins and different political habits live under a single government. Traditionally, empires are created by conquest and maintained by coercion. Yet there is no reason why they cannot be preserved by consent. Fifty years ago, Americans believed that this was true. "God," remarked Senator Beveridge in a debate on the Philippines, "has marked us as His chosen people to lead in the regeneration of the world. He has made us adepts in government that we may administer government amongst savages and servile people." The American record in the islands largely justified this claim, but Americans recoiled from the task of holding a dependency, and cut the tie. The idea of holding together widely different civilizations within a democratic imperial union seemed so bizarre to Americans that it was seldom suggested.

Yet Soviet Russia, the Netherlands, Great Britain and France attempted to do this. For a long time before the war they had been engaged in transforming coercive into co-operative imperialism. Russia had and still has the easiest time because there was no ruling race in Czarist Russia which had to be dislodged by its successors. The cultural level of most nationalities under Soviet control is not so far below that of the Russians themselves as to make co-operation difficult. The Soviets have not yet given these peoples the right to rule themselves; they have far less economic self-determination than the natives in the pith-helmet belt used to have. Although the republics have the constitutional right of separation, individuals who have suggested exercising it have been dealt with as "class enemies." Except for the absence of capitalism, the U.S.S.R. is a fair example of genuine imperialism.

Great Britain, usually associated with imperialism in its worst form, has actually succeeded in organizing a co-operative empire—at least in respect to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa—at the same time fairly well solving racial-minority problems in Canada and South Africa. So far, she has failed in India. It is not easy to transform the peoples of a vast Oriental country which still lacks national, cultural and religious unity into willing partners in a commonwealth of free nations. But the effort to accomplish this has not been abandoned. The Cripps offer of full partnership, including the right to separation, still stands. England's dangerous experience with Irish neutrality during the present war had not persuaded the new British imperialists to give up the fight for a co-operative commonwealth.

The First World War brought down two empires, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. The subsequent history of Eastern Europe has centered around the problem of what to do with the pieces. Experience has shown that they cannot survive of themselves. At the moment, they are being advised to renounce their sovereignty and seek shelter with others in a world, or at least a continental, union. This may be a counsel of perfection, for a small state would probably find

that it had less weight in such a union than in a more limited co-operative empire whose subject it may have been. Were the Dutch East Indies, for example, with their 60,000,000 inhabitants speaking sixty languages, to be separated from the immediate guidance of the Dutch and left to shift for themselves, even in a "world state," they might easily break up into groups of disconnected islands incapable of co-operation among themselves and certainly unable to defend themselves against the next aggressor.

As popularly interpreted, the Atlantic Charter proclaims the end of compulsory empires. It outlaws the Axis powers' efforts to set up such regimes and makes somewhat less specific pledges on behalf of the United Nations. But does it block the way to the transformation of coercive empires into democratic co-operative associations in which all nationalities enjoy equal rights and full cultural and political freedom under a common government in which they all share? Destruction of empires is easy enough. But unless a means is found to serve the common purposes of peoples thrown together by past conquests, long-established habit or mere geography, the death of empires will not be an unmixt blessing. Pending more conclusive signs of global unity than are now seen, the step toward eventual world government least likely to produce disillusion will be an effort to transform existing coercive empires into co-operative commonwealths—an evolution, incidentally, which was in process before the war came along to accelerate it.

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It Belongs to All Free Men

WHEN, on the Fourth of July, a London newspaper printed the full text of the Declaration of Independence, some people raised their eyebrows as if this were a bizarre piece of trucking by the once-proud British Empire, a gesture designed to grease the hand that is feeding Britain. There were probably English newspaper readers who had never read the Declaration before, and there may even have been some who rather resented the colonial charge that King George III had "sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people," "abolished the free system of English laws," "excited domestic insurrections among us," and "plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns and destroyed the lives of our people."

If such ignorance exists, it must be that the episode of the Revolution is as badly taught in England as it is in the United States. For the bad opinion of King George and Lord North which was held by Thomas Jefferson and the other signers can be matched by equally vigorous language by English statesmen of that tumultuous era. It was William Pitt who greeted the news from Lexington and Concord by declaring in Parliament that the colonists of Massachusetts were fighting for the same rights which Englishmen would die to protect at home. Charles James Fox described Lord Howe's first victory over the Americans as "the terrible news from Long Island." Edmund Burke declared on the floor of the House that he would rather be a prisoner in the Tower of London than enjoy the blessings of freedom in the company of the men who were trying to "enslave America."

The point is that the battle for freedom which began in 1775 had supporters in England who understood what the issues were. The Declaration of Independence, like Magna Charta, is a milestone on the road to expanding human freedom, and there is no inconsistency in its recognition as such by English people as well as by Americans. As a matter of fact, it would be useless for any nation to attempt to create a monopoly in such monuments to liberty, for all the world profits from freedom's victories by whomever they are won.

Indeed, the English people were by no means defeated by the final American triumph at Yorktown. As John Fiske sums it up in his *Critical Period of American History*, "the system which George III had sought to fasten upon America, in order that he might fasten it on England, was shaken off and shattered by the good people of both countries at almost the same moment of time."

That there are Englishmen in the twentieth century who understand this as well as thousands of Englishmen who understood it in the eighteenth is encouraging. It has taken a global war to mirror clearly to some of us historic events whose true significance has been concealed by spread-eagle speeches on this side of the ocean and haughty indifference on the other. This may prove one of the inadvertent services performed by the dictators for those who have enjoyed liberty so long that they have forgotten how they won it.

The Services Need More Nurses

ALTHOUGH more than 35,000 nurses are now serving with the Army or Navy, the need is by no means satisfied. During the next year it is estimated that something like 30,000 additional nurses will be required. Including 35,000 students now in training, the number of nurses available for service with the Army or Navy is estimated at about 195,000. In recent months the rate of enlistments has fallen off, and the Army and Navy Nurse Corps is making an effort to convince more nurses that their first duty in this emergency is to serve the sick and wounded among our fighting men. The article by Pete Martin in the Post for July thirty-first must have convinced a good many American young women that the life of an Army nurse, while hard and exacting, is by no means barren of romance and adventure.

Of course, this need puts a new strain upon civilian hospital staffs, already on desperately short rations, and the call for girls to study nursing and for women to take Red Cross courses in home nursing or to qualify as nurses' aides is increasingly urgent. The Post is glad to add its endorsement to the appeal of the services and the Red Cross for an increasingly large number of women with the necessary age and educational qualifications to contribute their skill and patriotic endeavor to meet the crisis in the care of sick soldiers and sailors and of the civilians who are left behind.

Liberty's Guardians Score a Miss

MANY people do not care for the American Civil Liberties Union. They suspect it of being pink, and interested mainly in the liberties of left-wingers to bore the rest of us, including from within. The Union has occasionally defended conservatives, but its critics feel that this is mostly to keep the franchise. Nevertheless, we believe that, by and large, the C. L. U. has been useful in calling public attention to some egregiously dirty tricks and persecutions.

All the more interesting, therefore, is the Union's recent statement that it is not interested in the Associated Press case because "whether it is desirable public policy to make press associations common carriers is a matter which does not raise an issue of civil liberties or civil rights."

Well, all we can say about that is that, if the object of the Government is to make the press services "common carriers" or "public utilities," as Government counsel put it, a vital issue of civil liberty is involved. For, after all, violations of civil liberty do not consist solely in police attacks on Communist mass meetings, framing of innocent Reds on trumped-up charges, or even laws requiring religious fanatics to take out a license before playing sacrilegious phonograph records on an unwilling listener's front porch. Liberty is definitely compromised when the distribution of news is conceded to be a public utility, subject to regulation as such. Nor is it only the liberty of the publishers which would be curtailed. As the Supreme Court declared in the Louisiana newspaper-tax case, "To allow it [the press] to be fettered is to fetter ourselves."

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