

THE CHANGING EMPIRE

By ALFRED LUECKENHAUS

Some of the most profound developments of the last few years have taken place so gradually that few readers of the daily newspapers have really become aware of them. Among them are the changes which the British Empire has undergone lately and is still undergoing every day. By assembling numerous symptoms, the following article draws the attention of our readers to this development.

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TODAY it seems to be the opinion of friend and many a foe alike that the British Empire in its present shape will have ceased to exist by the time the war is over. Where opinion differs, this is not in substance but only as regards the extent. There are those who believe that the end of the war will see the total dissolution of the Empire, while others regard the continued existence of larger or lesser parts as possible. We ourselves feel that the imponderables of this gigantic struggle do not permit any precise forecast. However, we agree without reservation that, even before hostilities are over, the Empire will have undergone tremendous changes, both physically and spiritually.

The present war has raised a multitude of issues within the Empire which can no longer be solved in the former style of Britain's rulers. The component parts of the Empire are becoming increasingly skeptical towards the idea of Empire because, once again, the Commonwealth, under London's leadership, has shown itself neither strong enough to preserve peace nor strong enough to win victories in war. It has failed to offer adequate protection to its outlying parts. Why, after all, have the Dominions joined forces with the mother country for many decades, why have they pooled all their resources—in many cases contrary to the laws of supply and demand—if not to seek safety in numbers? Why did Australia, instead of fostering her much

more natural markets in near-by East Asia, let her freighters travel twelve thousand miles and more to carry wool, wheat, and meat to distant England and other remote parts of the Empire? Superficially, they did so for mutual benefit in a small world of their own which happens to be populated mainly by descendants of the Anglo-Saxon race, but, in the final analysis, they have clung together because it has given them a sense of security against possible dangers from without.

JUNIOR PARTNERS

As far as the question of the Empire's existence is concerned, the Dominions are the only parts that count. India, for instance, is not an equal partner within the framework of the Commonwealth because the Indians are supposed to be unfit for self-government. The main reason for not giving India dominion status is the fact that the true meaning of the word "Commonwealth"—a name that in itself seems to suggest the commercial nature of the "British Empire Ltd."—does not apply to India. If it did, the profits which the City has been and is still deriving from India would become more or less negligible. The events of the last few months have shown that Britain will not voluntarily give up her domination over India and that this can only be accomplished by military means and the determination of the Indians themselves.

In the opinion of the London Government, the following "junior partners,"

called Dominions, enjoy equal rights (and obligations) with England: the Irish Free State (Eire), Canada, Newfoundland, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Only the latter two, however, are inhabited overwhelmingly by people of Anglo-Saxon extraction, if we exclude Newfoundland as being politically unimportant. Canada as well as the Union of South Africa have strong non-British minorities who for some time past have advocated a course of action which, had it been adopted by the ruling majority, might have prevented the disaster the Empire is now facing. Eire has steadfastly refused to let herself be drawn into the war, resisting promises as well as political and economic pressure. Even the threat of military action could not make Eire change her mind. As a result, southern Ireland, although probably suffering some privation because of lack of foodstuffs and other necessities, has been spared the horrors of war and is moving towards total independence.

RETARDED EVOLUTION

But what are the influences which have caused the other Dominions to follow England's lead on the road to war? Evolution has been England's guiding principle in preserving the community of interests ever since the Empire was established. This process culminated in the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which sets forth: "The Crown is the symbol of the free association of the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations." It places the Dominions beyond the control of any legislation on the part of the British Parliament and enables them to legislate freely without restraint by that body. These concessions, however, came much too late to keep in step with the rapid, revolutionary change in the international scene during the years after the first World War. Resting on the laurels of that Pyrrhic victory, the central government of the Empire tried to retain as many of its former rights and privileges as possible. And it gave way only whenever pressure on the part of the Dominions became too strong.

The Statute of Westminster, while granting the Dominions an almost unlimited independence as far as their domestic affairs were concerned, failed to give them an equal share of responsibility in the Empire's relations with the rest of the world. An arrangement "to consult each other" in such questions was called upon to smooth away any possible misgivings in this respect. But it was the British Government which supplied the information, data, and facts on which London proposed to consult. The Dominions had no opportunity of verifying the correctness of the material with which they were provided. It was like a civil suit or a criminal trial in which one of the three principal parties—the judge, the prosecution, or the defense—is not given an opportunity to study the deeds or examine the witnesses. There is, of course, the Imperial Conference, a permanent institution with all the Empire's Prime Ministers as members; but it met very rarely, and, like its many subcommittees, it dealt chiefly with questions of defense, statistics, economics, and education. We do not remember that any foreign affair of major importance was ever discussed in it.

It might quite naturally be argued that any British subject is entitled to enter the field of politics in Great Britain or, if qualified, the British Civil Service and thereby counterbalance any possible action that might be harmful to the interests of the Dominion he represents. This, however, is mere theory. In practice—to mention only one example—there were only three Australians in the British diplomatic service prior to the present war, none of whom held a key position. At least one of them, as we happen to know, was favorably disposed to a peaceful solution of the Polish problem; but when the crisis came to a head he did not have a chance to raise his voice.

In recent years the Dominions have tried to increase their influence in the conduct of the Empire's foreign affairs by appointing envoys of their own to the great powers. There were, for example,

Irish and South African Legations in Berlin, Canadian and Australian Legations in Tokyo, and the latter two Dominions now maintain legations in Washington and Moscow. The London Government and the officialdom of the Foreign Office, however, did their utmost to keep the reins of foreign affairs in their own hands.

ISOLATION OR INTERVENTION?

If the Dominions had been properly represented in the central government and its civil services, and if co-operation in political and diplomatic matters had been as close as it actually was in matters of defense and economics, England might justly claim that the present war was of concern to the Empire as a whole. As it happened, however, the London Government, fifteen minutes after its ultimatum to Berlin had expired without the desired effect, declared war on Germany and thereby involved not only the British Isles but the whole Empire in a life-and-death struggle, drawing in its wake a multitude of crown colonies and other territories, no matter by what kind, creed, or color they were inhabited. To most of these people it was a matter of indifference whether the Germans built a highway to East Prussia or not. It is true that the British Government consulted the heads of the Dominion Governments forty-eight hours before the outbreak of war, but there was no previous consent given by the Dominion parliaments.

It might be said that one Dominion, Canada, was well represented in London in the person of Lord Beaverbrook. Dealing and speculating in pulp and newspaper some thirty years ago, he made a large fortune in Canada with which he later built up his newspaper concern in England. In the twenty years since Versailles, Beaverbrook has been the personification of the Empire Idea, and day in, day out, he advocated a policy of "splendid isolation" in his newspapers, of which the *London Daily Express* and *Evening Standard* are the most important. It was he who continually preached that

England should dissociate herself from all political and economic matters outside the Empire and that she should concentrate all her efforts on the development of the still incompletely exploited riches of the Empire. Although it might be open to question whether it was the best possible course to propagate the notion that these immense areas should live a life of detachment and isolation without regard for the needs of their less fortunate neighbors, it was, in the circumstances then obtaining, a much better policy than the one pursued by the various British Governments which, by interfering in the affairs of Europe and East Asia, eventually led to the second World War and the present plight of the Empire.

AMERICA ENTERS THE PICTURE

Of paramount importance to the British Empire are its relations with America. America first became aware of the possibility of herself directing the destiny of the world as a result of the last war which, to her mind, was decided by America tipping the scales. Owing to the USA's shifting from the position of debtor nation to that of creditor nation, New York gradually began to replace London as the center of world finance. The Washington Naval Conference firmly established the United States, at least numerically, as a first-rate naval power with a fleet second to none. But it was not until F. D. Roosevelt became President that America really made a serious bid for world supremacy. For what else is Roosevelt's solemn proclamation of his determination to enforce "the four American freedoms" in all the corners of the world if not the desire to police the entire globe?

In view of the fact that, even in the fairly normal pre-war days, the United States did not succeed in solving her own domestic problems, we must ask whether America is in a position to shoulder additional responsibilities. President Roosevelt seems to think so. By making America the "Arsenal of Democracy," he supplied all those whom he thought in

line with his conception of the world of tomorrow with weapons and ammunition to fight the rising "have-not" nations. But while he is further than ever from his dream of becoming the arbiter of the world's destiny, he has quite successfully tackled the more immediate task of taking over one after another of his ally's positions.

LIKE THE MISSISSIPPI . . .

A little less than one year after the outbreak of the war in Europe, Roosevelt acquired British territories in the Western Hemisphere in exchange for about fifty antiquated American destroyers. To this day, no one really knows whether it was Roosevelt or Churchill who actually suggested this deal.

America's advantage in the deal was that she traded some old ships, many of which have by now been sunk, for solid strategic bases. Churchill's gains are less clear. Of course, he needed the destroyers; but why was it necessary to part with the territories in question for a period of ninety-nine years? Could it have been that Churchill thought it worth while to sell the USA an active interest in the participation of the war by letting American destroyers fight in the front lines, even though, for the time being, under the British flag? Churchill, himself half American through his mother, is well acquainted with the mentality of the American masses, and it is quite likely that psychological reasons played a large part in the deal which certainly met Roosevelt's own intentions. In his speech of August 20, 1940, Churchill declared in the House of Commons:

"Undoubtedly the two great organizations of the English-speaking democracies, the British Empire and the United States, will have to be somewhat mixed up together in some of their affairs for mutual and general advantage. For my own part, I do not view the process with any misgivings. I could not stop it if I wished; no one can stop it. Like the Mississippi, it just keeps rolling along."

Some time earlier, with the connivance of the ruling classes of both Great Britain and America, a movement was launched

in favor of "Union Now," which, of course, meant the amalgamation of the two countries. American papers took up the cry of Mr. Clarence Streit, under whose name the campaign was running. On the part of the British, this union would be an act of sheer despair, just as it was an act of despair when, in the face of France's collapse, Churchill suggested common citizenship of the peoples of England and France so as to enable the London Government to declare that France, although largely occupied, was still in the war on England's side. As an alternative to winning the war, Churchill and his friends are bent on attempting a fusion of the two nations who even now are using a common name: Anglo-America. In Roosevelt, they are certain to find a partner who is only too glad to co-operate. According to a White House statement made in June 1942, discussions and consultations between the British Parliament and the US Congress are planned, even joint sittings being envisaged.

. . . OR MORE LIKE A FLOOD ?

Since the destroyer deal of 1940, the British attitude toward America has undergone a change. The very Englishmen who applauded Churchill's words about the Mississippi are now afraid that this mighty river may not confine itself to "just rolling along" but may instead flood one after another of the possessions of the British Empire. We mention here some symptoms which have caused anxiety to the British:

There was the sensational "Open Letter" in *Life*, in which Mr. Davenport, the manager of Mr. Willkie's presidential campaign in 1940, says that the British might some day lose their American ally if they continue to fight the war for the chief purpose of preserving the British Empire. This must have sounded bitterly ironical to the British; for, while they have to hear from the Americans that the preservation of the Empire is of no particular concern to them, the Americans themselves are, in one way or another, increasing their influence in a growing part of that very Empire. American

troops have been dispatched to Australia, Canada, Egypt, Northern Ireland, the Near East, and to the British possessions in West Africa. An American admiral is in charge of the Bermuda Islands (a British possession), the New Zealand forces in the Pacific have just been placed under American command, and a US garrison has been established on the Bahrein Islands, the British key position in the Persian Gulf on the air route to India and a rich source of oil.

The Americans have come as allies, but many Englishmen are apprehensive. While the British are forced to abandon their hundred-year-old extraterritoriality in China, they have had to grant extraterritoriality to the US troops stationed in Great Britain. The staffs of American diplomatic missions and consulates in Egypt and in the Middle East are in certain places twice as large as the corresponding British ones. By subsidizing a number of newspapers in the Near East they have obtained considerable influence there.

THE FIFTIETH STAR

The British have frequently been shown in which direction the aspirations of the Americans are running. For instance, Major Fielding Elliot, an outstanding American military commentator, recently declared that the Allied nations should have *one* supreme military command and that this should have its seat in Washington under Roosevelt, an idea that has meanwhile been endorsed by a former Canadian envoy to Washington. Wendel Willkie, on his return from his world tour, suggested the American General MacArthur as supreme Allied commander. A poll of public opinion taken last summer by the magazine *Fortune* showed that two thirds of the American population favored Washington as the capital and the dollar as the currency of the Anglo-Saxon nations.

There is also the growing discontent of the Dominions, the result of the severe losses which they have suffered on battlefields far from home. After a visit to Australia, the American radio commenta-

tor Cecil Brown observed in *Life* that the Australians were drifting more and more away from England toward the USA. South Africa is deeply disturbed over the sacrifices of her sons on the battlefields of Libya and Egypt; and Canada, too, has become rather critical since Dieppe.

US investments have penetrated deeply into the economic life of Canada and established a strong American position there; the Skagway/Whitehorse railway in northwestern Canada has just been ceded to the US Army; and the *Boston Herald* has already suggested that the American flag should soon have a fiftieth star for Canada. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand know that they cannot exist alone in the world as it is today. The deeper their disappointment in England, the stronger grows their tendency toward the USA, which has for a long time been their ideal in many respects, from Hollywood to Detroit.

The British are trying to appease the Dominions by promises of a bright future, such as those which Lord Selbourne, British Minister of Economic Warfare, recently made in the House of Lords. He said that, after the end of this war, the present House of Commons would be replaced by separate parliaments for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and that a super-parliament for the entire Empire will be created with its headquarters at some centrally located place, probably Capetown. It is very unlikely that such promises will convince the Dominions.

THE MORTGAGE

Great Britain and America do not see eye to eye with regard to India. The New York correspondent of the London *Daily Mail* recently lamented the fact that the American newspapers, which are devoting a great deal of attention to the Indian problem, do not at all defend the British point of view. In his by now famous "Open Letter" in *Life*, Mr. Davenport addressed this reproach to his British allies: "Can you expect us, in the face of your policy towards India,

to talk about principles and, on top of that, look our soldiers straight in the eye?" The American criticism of their Indian policy is particularly upsetting to the British because they fear that here, too, the Americans may be following their own ambitious policy and are preparing the ground for an increase in their own influence in that part of the world.

Side by side with this goes the decline of British trade throughout the world. The lend-lease arrangement is a most ingenious device of Roosevelt's. Through it, America has obtained the right to send her own officials into the British Empire to check up on the proper distribution of lend-lease material. Furthermore, Britain has had to promise not to export anything that includes materials obtained from the USA on the lend-lease basis, which offers new possibilities for American supervision. The ground gained by American trade at the expense of Britain is most clearly to be observed in the case of South America.

No wonder that, in these circumstances, British public opinion is deeply disturbed. If the American press has lately used the term "war of survival" to an increasing extent, the British must be beginning to wonder who it is the Americans expect to survive. *The Economist* recently said that England, in her position toward

America, is moving from that of a partner to that of a poor relation, explaining that to the average American the British war effort during the past year appeared like campaigns fought by Australian troops with American equipment; and *The National Review* complained the other day that America already considers Britain a second-class nation.

Even the *London Times*, in a startling article published on August 1, admitted with resignation that in future the closest co-operation of Great Britain with the USA in the field of colonial policies would be unavoidable, and that the Government of the United States is very likely to desire participation in the development of British colonies. Thus the British are beginning to realize that, even in the case of an Anglo-American victory, they will no longer be the leading power in the world or even in their own house. They know that, as a result of their constantly growing indebtedness to the USA, America today possesses a heavy mortgage on large parts of the Empire.

So the British are facing an unhappy situation, from whichever angle they look at the results of the war. They have lost part of their Empire to their enemies, they are losing other parts to their allies. And the longer the war lasts, the smaller will be that part which is likely to remain in their hands.

Every action is a wise or unwise investment for future dividends. The past is gone; what we call the present moment goes over to the past even when we are saying the word, leaving only the future in which to work and enjoy. Whatever we do is done for an effect in that future, be it near or far, a minute or a year. Consider well, then, the effect you are trying to produce.

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