

HELP IF WE ASK FOR IT

British Council Holds Out A Hand



SIR ANGUS GILLAN

"**B** RITISH Council for what?" was the question I had to answer everywhere. The exceptions were journalists, professors and lecturers, and others who for special reasons had already heard of the Council and made use of some of its facilities. Very few New Zealanders have heard of it at all, and its name, as it now stands, is far from self-explanatory. Originally I think it was the "British Council for Cultural Relations with Other Countries," though I find no mention of that name in the Council handbook now in front of me. It was established by His Majesty's Government in 1934, to interpret Britain in the widest sense to people not living in the United Kingdom. In the more formal words of the Royal Charter granted to it in 1940, its purposes are "the promotion of a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom abroad and the development of closer cultural relations between the United Kingdom and other countries." In the first place, it was started as a counter-measure to the culture-propaganda of the Fascists and Nazis, who were, to put it in the words of Sir Angus Gillan, "rather getting away with it, and leading the world to believe that all art came from Italy and all science from Germany."

The British resident abroad and the British traveller had noticed a meagre knowledge overseas of their country, of ordinary British people, how they lived and what they thought, the present organisation of the state, and the achievements of the nation in science, letters, art, and so forth. The British Council now supplies that knowledge in foreign countries all over the world. During the present war it decided to make its facilities available to Empire countries too, and though war conditions have limited its activities outside the United Kingdom, its Home Division has done a great deal with service personnel there.

Two Way Traffic

Sir Angus Gillan (who was administrative officer in the Sudan for 30 years) puts the Council's objects in

SIR ANGUS GILLAN, Director of the Empire Division of the British Council, and Arthur Towsey, Regional Officer for the Pacific to the Council, have just completed an exploratory tour of Australia and New Zealand, with a view to initiating British Council activities here. A member of "The Listener" staff accompanied them on their short tour of New Zealand, in the joint capacities of escort and arranger of meetings with New Zealanders, and representative of "The Listener." The following article describes the nature and scope of the Council's work, and shows in what ways New Zealand may hope to benefit by it.

these words: "We don't come to shove anything down your throats. We don't say 'This is the way you ought to live.' We say 'This is the way we live. Have a look at it. Take what you want, and leave the rest. And if in turn you can tell us something about yourselves, so much the better. The traffic has to flow both ways.'"

The British Council is not a Government department. Its independent Charter gives it power to "accept, hold, and dispose of" moneys (mostly voted by Parliament) to these ends. Apart from occasional donations, almost all its funds come from a grant carried in Parliament on the Foreign Office vote. The lists of names on its Advisory Committees are perhaps the best and most concise way to indicate here the standards maintained in its various fields. On the Books and Periodicals committee, for instance, are Stanley Unwin (chairman), Edward Carter, Geoffrey C. Faber, Mrs. Mary Hamilton, and Rebecca West. The late Philip Guedalla headed the Film committee. On the Fine Arts committee are Clive Bell, Sir Kenneth Clark, Captain Gerald Coke, Ernest Makower, Herbert Read, and others. Musical readers will note with interest some of the names of the Music committee—Arthur Bliss, Sir Adrian Boult, Leslie Boosey, Prof. E. J. Dent, Dame Myra Hess, Victor Hely-Hutchinson, William Walton, J. A. Westrup, and R. Vaughan-Williams. The president of the Executive Committee is Lord Tyrrell of Avon, and the Chairman, Sir Malcolm Robertson. The Executive committee includes several names from the special committees mentioned above.

The methods adopted have been these:

- (1) The formation of cultural centres abroad—"British Institutes," which as any New Zealander who has refugee friends may discover, have a high reputation among serious-minded people in the capitals and cities where they function.
- (2) The encouragement of Anglophil societies (new or existing) in foreign countries, and of cultural centres in British colonies.
- (3) The formation or support of British schools (where a demand exists) in foreign countries.
- (4) The provision of scholarships to enable foreigners to study English or other subjects in Britain.
- (5) The provision of facilities for foreigners and servicemen in Britain to gain a true picture of the national life.

Agencies Abroad

A British Institute is directly under Council control, and is a centre of British studies, giving first place to the English language. It has classes and lectures, a

library (literary and technical), club-rooms, and reading rooms. It receives distinguished men and women sent from England to lecture, shows documentary films, both general and technical, houses periodical exhibitions of paintings, photographs and so on. It may have an orchestra and choir, play-reading groups, social activities, even football and hockey teams. There are nine Institutes in Egypt, five in Palestine and Cyprus, others in Spain, Portugal, Ethiopia, the Belgian Congo, and so on. The Valetta one (Malta) has 3000 members. Those in Lisbon and Madrid have 2000 students and members each.

An Anglophil Society differs from an Institute in being a group of friends of Great Britain, supported by the Council. It has been the Council's policy to encourage such societies where they are founded by local initiative and not to attempt to create them where such initiative is lacking. In other respects they closely resemble the British Institutes. Their activities follow the pattern just described.

In some countries there are no Institutes. In Sweden, for example, the Representative has his office in Stockholm, and makes arrangements for various activities in the capital and elsewhere. Lectures are given in many societies, universities and schools, and instruction is given to Swedish teachers of English. There are exhibitions of photographs, and the publication of books in English is arranged. Malcolm Sargent comes to conduct concerts; the poet T. S. Eliot, Sir Kenneth Clark (Director of the National Gallery), Sir Lawrence Bragg and C. D. Darlington (scientists) come to lecture, and learned bodies are encouraged to make contacts with their British counterparts. In other countries, the methods differ again (in Turkey, for instance, where for reasons of tact, the whole of the Council's educational work goes on within the Turkish educational system, and the rest goes on in the Halkreis, or People's Houses. In the Soviet and in China, the Council's work is still in the early stages. Even so, in China, it is already very extensive and very popular.

Plans for New Zealand

However, the New Zealand reader will be chiefly interested, not so much in how the British Council has gone about its work in foreign countries, as in those aspects of its work in general that we may expect to see in our own country. Although official approval from both sides has yet to be made final, after



ARTHUR TOWSEY

Sir Angus has reported in England and our own Government has considered the matter, we may nevertheless expect to see a representative in New Zealand, and the provision of facilities if we ask for them, for widening our own cultural life and advancing our technical studies.

Australia and New Zealand are the first Dominions to be visited in this way by the British Council (although we have already won scholarships, received booklets and one art exhibition, seen films, and heard music, all without the general public being very much aware of the organisation that made them available), and the approach will, of course, be different from that adopted in foreign and suspicious countries.

Perhaps the best way to explain these activities in detail is to classify them under the various spheres of interest, to show roughly what the Council has to offer to the man interested in education, law, British science and industry, agriculture, medicine, sport, seamanship, exploration, literature, philosophy, music, the fine arts, the theatre, ballet, and so forth.

EDUCATION

A RRANGEMENTS for the teaching of English have already been described. Many British schools abroad (mostly in the Mediterranean area) are supported. Scholarships are awarded to foreigners, and also to citizens of the Empire, enabling them to study in Britain. During the war, male scholarships were not made available to Empire students, but three women from New Zealand have gone to England, one to study architecture, one speech therapy, one industrial relations.

PUBLICATIONS

T HE series, *British Life and Thought*, and *Britain Advances*, are on sale here, as well as the periodical *Britain To-day*, in all of which the aim is to employ acknowledged experts, not lesser lights paid to do a job of propaganda. The Council's Book Export Scheme, which is not intended to operate in the United States or the Dominions, aims to

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