

Aftermath in Indo-China

OUR Government has had a brief visit from Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, who for ten years has been British Commissioner-General in South-East Asia, and was recently reappointed. I suppose his experience is such that nobody knows more about that area. I don't know what Mr. MacDonald told our Government, but it is not difficult to make an intelligent guess.

Just before he left Singapore for Australia and New Zealand, Mr. MacDonald held a Press Conference, and I have read what a very competent and experienced Australian representative, Mr. Denis Warner, wrote after listening to him. I want to make it quite clear that Mr. Warner did not quote Mr. MacDonald, but before writing he had had the advantage of listening to him. You remember that the conference in Geneva succeeded in arranging a ceasefire in Indo-China, and a political settlement under which the country was partitioned between North and South. It looked a fairly tidy arrangement on paper, and there was a fair amount of gratification expressed. We even heard the opinion that, for once, the Communists had made some concessions; they hadn't grabbed all they could have grabbed. But it may soon appear that the Communists didn't insist on plucking all the fruit from the Indo-China tree because they judged the rest of it would fall into their laps.

At any rate, Mr. Warner began with these words: "If the Australian Government bases its South East Asian policies on the assumption that South Vietnam will be held it will be misled as dangerously as other nations were misled during the years of continuing reversal that preceded the battle for Dien Bien Phu. It would be national folly to proceed to formulate a policy for South-East Asian defence, based on the assumption that South Vietnam, and Laos, will be denied to the Communists."

Mr. Warner went on to make a country-by-country survey of the area. I can't quote that in detail, but will very inadequately summarise it by saying he reports that North Vietnam is under the tight control of the Communists, who have expanded their army to 10 divisions. South Vietnam, by contrast, is in something like chaos, caused by weak government and internal dissensions.

Cambodia is in a much stronger position, but will finally be dependent on what happens in Laos. And in Laos the Communists have a firm grip in the North and are working industriously elsewhere. Siam is threatened by subversion. In Malaya, Communist armed strength is undiminished. In Indonesia there is no halt in the deterioration.

Now this is the heart of the area with which the Manila agreement is concerned. Laos and Cambodia and South-Indo-China have been designated as territories within the purview of the treaty. If they are attacked the signatories of the treaty will regard that attack as an attack on one of themselves. There is a proviso that no action may be taken on their territories unless they desire it.

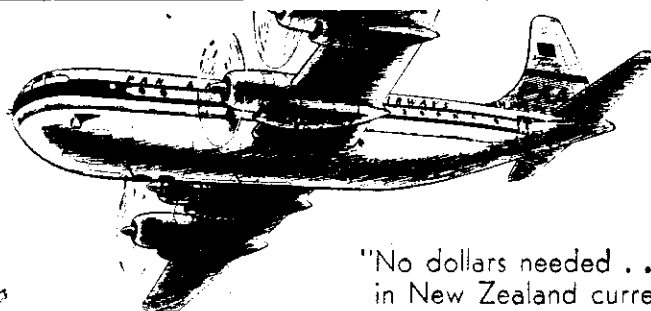
It appears, if these reports are true (and you will have noticed that both Sir Anthony Eden and Mr. Dulles have expressed anxiety about the developments in Indo-China) that a situation is in the making which the treaty's signatories will find it difficult or impossible

Extracts from a recent commentary on the international news broadcast from the main National Stations of the NZBS

to deal with. And this is happening before the treaty has been ratified by those who signed it. I don't mean that South Indo-China is in danger of armed attack. If it is going to fall down through its own weakness, why should the Communists push it? It has been said that the effect of the Seato agreement was to erect a signpost "Trespassers will be prosecuted." I wonder where it will be possible to erect that notice. It may not be in Indo-China at all.

—E. V. DUMBLETON,
November 27, 1954.

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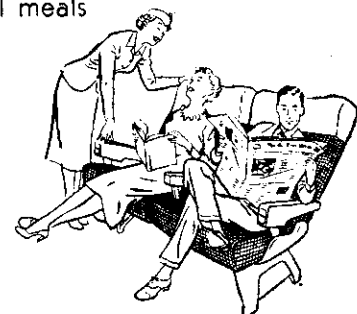
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