

CONFLICTING POLICIES IN ASIA

FOR Australia and New Zealand the primary interest at the Prime Ministers' Conference is the consultation there must be on policies in South-East Asia, particularly on the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation. It has to be remembered that when the treaty was agreed upon last year India and Ceylon were not parties. They still are not. Only Pakistan among the Asian partners in the Commonwealth agreed to enter. Britain's reluctance to embrace the American idea of a specific alliance and the drawing of a "no trespassing" line across South-East Asia was not difficult to understand. She feared this would impose a strain within the Commonwealth too hard for it to bear. There remains that danger. The American and Australian anxiety to build a posture of strength seems likely to force the drawing of a rigid line and the building of defence in one form or another in increasing might behind it.

It is not difficult to appreciate the pressures that could set up within the Commonwealth and the hostility that could be aroused among friendly and neutral Asians if there were a full surrender to the American and Australian ideas about the conduct of policy in Asia. It may still be hoped that diplomacy and commonsense can avert a situation in which the Seato Powers rely wholly upon arms to prevent another war. But that situation does, nonetheless, seem to be developing. India remains outside the Seato organisation. She is most unlikely to enter it and thereby destroy her position of neutrality. It is not unfortunate that she takes this position. . .

Parallel with the Prime Ministers' Conference, there will be talks on defence strategy, in which the Australian and New Zealand Prime Ministers will engage with Sir Winston Churchill and defence chiefs. . . For New Zealand it is clear that there is likely to be a drawing of our outer defences inward from the traditional Middle East base to the Pacific area. Australia felt the same compulsion during the last war. New Zealand now shares it under the pressure of Asian events and new kinds of warfare.

The emphasis, then, is at the moment upon defence organisation. The developments of 1954 have compelled that. But in the approach this year to the future in the Pacific and South-East Asia it does seem important that we should not fall into reliance upon the belief that security and peace can be guaranteed simply by the building of military alliances and the staffing of new bases. Resort to these means alone would suggest that the battle of the peace has been lost. But need it be? British diplomacy, notably in India and Pakistan as we have already noted, has demonstrated that Asian and European can adjust themselves to partnership and get along together. It is surely important that we in the Pacific with Asian nations as next-door neighbours should recognise that fact. We in New Zealand and Australia seem hardly to have attempted to know and understand the politics of Asia. Recent Australian policy has had the effect of opening a deep gulf between Australians and the 70,000,000 nation of Indonesians lying

across her northern waters. Australia and New Zealand lack suitable diplomatic representation and other means of direct contact with the mind of certain countries likely to figure large in our future.

—PHILIP HEWLAND,
January 22, 1955.

AMERICA, with her democratic partners, especially the partners who are members of the British Commonwealth, is spending hundreds of millions of pounds helping the Asian world. That is a purposeful and practical gesture of goodwill. Yet, at the same time, by accident of circumstance, America is determinedly following a policy which is calculated to lessen any real hope of acquiring Asian goodwill. Communist China is not the only great Asian country involved. India is involved,

THE MIDDLE GROUND

too. Her neutrality in the red-hot peace brings constant complaint from America. This complaint arises from the outlook expressed by too many of America's leaders, an outlook put into two sentences quite recently by the President of the American Federation of Labour. . . "There can be no middle ground. If a man is anti-American, he is pro-Communist; if he is pro-American, he is anti-Communist."

That's altogether too simple an outlook. There is a middle ground, in which nations are neither pro-Communist nor anti-American. That ground is occupied by India's 360,000,000, by Burma's 16,000,000 and by Ceylon's 7,000,000. They're neutral in the struggle and they insist upon being neutral. And they've a right to be neutral, the same right that America herself exercised through many long years, right up to the middle of the First World War and in between the World Wars. That is something to remember. . .

The important thing to discover is exactly what their neutrality amounts to. In fact, it's a neutrality in the wide world struggle, but there it ends. Ceylon has dealt ruthlessly with local Communist leaders and has virtually outlawed the party. Burma has gone a long way towards victory in the internal war against Communist rebels. In India, Mr. Nehru has shown in his speeches the strongest opposition to Communism as a political principle. That's important, because the danger from Communism is shifting from open war, such as we had in Korea and Indo-China, towards infiltration and subversion. In these circumstances, what these Asian countries do within their own territories is tremendously important. Mr. Chester Bowles, a former American Ambassador to India, has explained what India's trying to do. . . "India is trying to prove that democracy can do the job. . . The survival in the world of our way of life depends on India's success."

If India and the other Asian countries are in fact trying to prove that democracy can do the job . . . then they are committed to the defence of their own sort of democracy within their own borders, defence against Communism as much as defence against anything else. This defence of their own sort of democracy was exactly the policy to which Americans dedicated themselves when their own Republic was formed. . . They were forced to abandon neutrality in

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the defence of the right of peoples everywhere to choose their own form of government. I think it's only logical to believe that if the new Asian Powers follow the same policy it will bring them, in the end, if it's necessary, to the defence of the same right in the same way.

—R. M. HUTTON-POTTS,
January 15, 1955.

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