

STILL A GREAT IMPERIAL NATION

Geoffrey Cox Discusses Britain and Her Problems

GEOFFREY COX, political correspondent for the *News Chronicle*, is well known in this country as a Rhodes Scholar, a war correspondent, and the author of several important books. He is also a broadcaster: his masterly talk on the political situation in Britain will be remembered as an outstanding pre-election analysis. At present he is briefly in New Zealand, after an absence of 20 years, to get material for broadcasts and newspaper articles, and to confer with Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger, editor-in-chief of the War History branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. Mr. Cox is writing a volume of the New Zealand War History on the desert campaign of 1941.

On the morning that *The Listener* saw Mr. Cox the news from Egypt was of fighting in Ismailia and rioting in Cairo. These events were reminders of the strain under which the people of England have been living for the past 12 years. The strain is still there, said Mr. Cox, though it is not much talked about in private, and there are no signs of outward agitation. Indeed, the English people are in surprisingly good shape. There has been an enormous amount of rebuilding. Many fine new buildings have gone up in bombed-out areas in London, and there has been a substantial housing development. A tremendous amount of capital has been invested in farming; the countryside has been transformed, and is looking very well. Money has gone into these activities rather than into consumption.

Nevertheless, although the English people have kept their stability and are

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and the Cup Final. This began the long friendship which came to its full, fantastic flowering in ITMA.

But Ted, the medical student (Auckland University, Edinburgh and Bart's) who could not concentrate on medicine after the intervention of World War I, and who drifted into radio after writing technical stuff for a firm of manufacturing chemists, is not one to dwell in the past.

His lively brain has accepted the challenge of television—"Nobody knows how to write television shows yet, but we keep trying"—and the field is wide open for a man of his ideas. No one has ever seen him working—in his own words: "Nobody has ever caught me at it," and how he packs in all these activities is a mystery. Yet, if he returned to New Zealand tomorrow, and he yearns to see the old haunts once again, his friends there wouldn't find any change in him. Stouter, perhaps, balder most certainly, but not a bit different from the quiet, rather shy school boy who burst into comic songs on the least provocation, and who is still surprised when he makes anyone laugh.

making progress, they cannot forget the danger of another war. "This possibility has receded sharply," said Mr. Cox. "but the fact remains that it has been a possibility since the Berlin airlift. No one can quite exclude from his mind the realisation of what another war would mean to England."

Re-emergence of Germany

This point had been emphasised for Mr. Cox by the easiness of manner he had noticed in New Zealand. It was not, he said, a question of greater informality, but simply of absence of strain. And this, he thought, was the biggest difference he had found between the peoples of Britain and New Zealand.

Although intelligent observers in England believe that the danger of war has receded, they are closely watching the situation in Germany. "There is a considerable division of opinion in England on German rearmament," said Mr. Cox. "A strong section of opinion thinks that the Germans must be rearmed; another equally strong section thinks differently. The effect of this has been to hold up the entire question. The Labour Government agreed in principle that Germany should be rearmed so that she could play her part in European affairs, but every time the step is about to be taken the subject again arouses controversy."

"I personally am against the rearming of Germany in present circumstances. No adequate safeguards for the use of German armed forces have been worked out, and we might well find that in time, unless such safeguards are established, the Germans would be prepared to use their new weapons against us once again."

Of one thing, however, Mr. Cox is certain: the re-emergence of Germany as an important Power can be expected in 1952. "Everyone who has been there speaks of tremendous economic development in West Germany. Industry and trade are being rebuilt. To turn the wireless on in England is to be deafened by German stations, and even over the air one can sense the vitality of the people."

Asked if Germany was following the same trade policy as Britain, Mr. Cox agreed that her aim was to capture overseas markets, and in making the attempt she was not hesitating to force a large degree of unemployment at home. This allowed her to catch the present needs of the world market—



GEOFFREY COX

N.P.S. photograph

Listeners will hear him from the YA and YZ stations at 9.15 p.m. on February 14, in the first of two talks on "A Changing Britain." The second of these will be heard on February 21, and a third broadcast—his impressions of New Zealand after an absence of 20 years—will be heard later, on a date yet to be fixed

especially in the sale of machine tools, engineering plant, equipment for power stations, etc. Britain, who had carried a large import expenditure since the war, and who was facing a heavy rearmament programme, now had to watch the Germans moving in on the markets of the world.

Similar action is being taken by the Japanese. When passing through Karachi, Mr. Cox had been struck by the enormous amount of Japanese advertising in Pakistani papers and trade magazines, emphasising the Japanese textile industry and the possibility of its expansion. "That is the kind of market in which this competition will be felt, especially by Lancashire. It led to a quite definite reaction against the Japanese Peace Treaty in the House of Commons."

Economic matters could not be discussed without some reference to the currency problems now being faced by the British Commonwealth. Mr. Cox sees the shortage of hard currency as a far more formidable trade barrier than any tariff system. "A tariff system and a shortage of dollars, as at present between the United Kingdom and the United States, forms the almost perfect barrier."

Food for Services Rendered

Conditions for mutual aid within the Commonwealth have changed since the Ottawa Agreements. "The most striking difference between 1932 and 1952," said Mr. Cox, "is that in 1932 world markets had a surplus of food. George Forbes was on his way home to plead with the British to buy more meat. Now we have almost the reverse situation in which Britain is pleading for New Zealand

land to send more meat. There is no way out except through a co-ordinated effort by the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand to tackle the food problem. The United Kingdom is short of food and wants more. New Zealand is not yet short of foreign exchange, so that the incentive to produce more food has not yet been strongly felt. New Zealand farmers are undoubtedly aware of Britain's needs: the extent to which the Dominion has taken lower prices is one indication of this."

Mr. Cox had some interesting things to say on the difficulty of arranging fair prices for foodstuffs. There are some Commonwealth services, he pointed out, which the United Kingdom provides without assistance. "The control of the Suez Canal area is one such service; retention of Malaya is another. No move has been made by the United Kingdom to suggest that other parts of the Commonwealth should be contributing. There is, perhaps, a point at which we touch the pride of the British people. In spite of all their difficulties, the English are still a great Imperial people, and to talk about 'twisting the lion's tail'—as one farmers' spokesman did recently—is ridiculous, because the lion at the other end is grappling with a host of foes, and you can't just look at him simply as a commercial animal. It is in New Zealand's interest, as well as Britain's, to find some means of increasing food production."

Stability Through Newsprint

In the situation described by Mr. Cox it seemed more than ever necessary that public opinion should be well informed. Could this be done, he was asked, while newsprint remains scarce and expensive?

Mr. Cox had no doubt that the problems of English newspapers were affecting the flow of information. The popular Press in England had been built up on the basis of 18 and 24-page papers before the war. This meant ample room to cater for popular tastes with magazine and sporting material and at the same time to give a daily report on what was happening in every part of the world.

"Since the war the Press, naturally enough, has been keeping itself ready to expand, and so in general form and make-up the papers have retained pre-war characteristics. By the time room has been found for news of day-to-day events, sport and popular features, no space is left for 'situation' articles. The public is therefore denied a picture of the situation in a country where anything vivid is happening. One result of this is the impression that life is an endless series of crises. The public is rushed from a crisis in Egypt to another in Korea and another in Indo-China without being able to follow the situations in detail."

"Then would a more generous supply of newsprint from North America eventually have a stabilising effect politically?"

"Yes. Newsprint is of immense importance. I'm not certain of the figures, but I think 50 periodicals and newspapers went out of existence in England last year. Some of these were very good local papers, weeklies and dailies, and that is where the mortality is dangerous in British journalism. Newsprint is scarce and dear, and to give the Press a chance a better supply is essential."