

Trips: Trips - 31

HS L 179:64



Dag Hammarskjöld's saml.

Trip to Stockholm/London 1954

21 Dec. 53

Address by Chester Wilmot in Sydney

ADDRESS BY CHESTER WILMOT.

Sydney - 21.12.53.

Sir Bertram, Gentlemen:

I would be less than human if I was not extremely moved by what Sir Bertram has said. I do thank you most warmly for coming here in such distinguished numbers. You, Sir Bertram, have said such extremely kind things: at least straining the word in my favour very greatly - but I do thank you sincerely. I have heard from many of your faith in and kindness to young men - and I am on the occasion of this visit to my own country the proud recipient of your generosity.

A man is always as strong as his friends, and in the particular clash when I fell foul of General Blamey, to which you have referred, there are two people in this room who stood very solidly beside me - Charles Moses and Daniel McVey and, without the particular support I got from the Australian Broadcasting Commission who stood by me throughout, and for very many friends, I would have been finished. I count myself very fortunate in having such extremely good friends.

Now, as you know, that particular debacle led to things which I never expected: and, to an involuntary exile. And so in England I stayed, and so in fact I have remained abroad; and, because of that, in a sense, I rather feel I am not the chap to speak about the question of Commonwealth migration - particularly the question of urging people to migrate from England. In fact, my family and I have fairly firmly settled in England: and, to be frank, no one has ever offered me a job in Australia. I came back to Australia in 1944 but no one offered me a job: I suppose there was no particular niche for me to fill. So to England I returned: but I have tried in many spheres to serve the country of my birth in whose great destiny I believe most firmly.

It might be useful if I talked about the general situation abroad, as it appears to a correspondent living for the most part in Europe and frequently visiting the United States, Far East and Asia; and its bearing upon Commonwealth policy in this present world situation - this very uncertain and unpleasant situation.

I do not believe that we are living on the edge of a third world war - that 1953 is the counterpart of 1938. I do not think that we are confronted with a situation that a world war is bound to be provoked. I do not think there is any comparison between Russian policy today and German policy in the 30's. I believe that the supreme interest of the Russians and Chinese is to avoid a world war - to play the game cautiously whenever they find themselves running into a situation which could lead to another war.

Why, then, are the Russians maintaining such a large force? I think that we have got to take into account initially the fact that the Russians are scared of the West: and, that they unquestionably believe that in due course capitalistic civilisation is bound to collapse, and before that collapse comes the capitalistic world will be forced to come into a war with the Soviet Union. And they are preparing themselves in strictly military terms with a very substantial number of troops. Why then do I feel that the Russians will, for a considerable time, pursue the policy of avoiding a world war and merely maintaining the tension just short of war? They would have gone for Germany, the key to Europe in 1948, when the West was defenceless if they were ready. They made a tentative move in Berlin, but when we met that blockade by the Berlin airlift, and when we broke it, they accepted it, lifted the blockade, and came to terms. That was, I

believe

believe, purely due to the fact that Russia did not possess atomic weapons, and the United States did: particularly in regard to the variety of weapons and the means of delivery. What was the restraining factor then, is a restraining factor today. The United States of America has solved the immediate problems with regard to the hydrogen bomb, and could perhaps use it. The means of delivery is available today to the Americans and is not available today to the Russians, and for that reason I believe the Russians will not feel sufficiently strong in atomic weapons to commit their whole cause to the hazard of a world war.

For the last four years the Russians have made no attempt to build up in Berlin: and the Russian forces in Eastern Germany have remained the same. There has been no increase in Russian strength: no attempt to maintain their margin of superiority and, in fact, they have even taken aircraft away from Germany to strengthen their defences in the Caucasus and the Ukraine.

I believe, that so far as Europe is concerned, the Russians realise they cannot move anywhere without provoking a world war: and that is why they have turned their attention to Asia. They provoked the attack in Korea, and when their plan was carried the Chinese came in and Russia was content to remain in the background. It is quite striking, I think, that the volume of supplies maintained from China to the Vietminh is still extremely small, and yet the Vietminh are extremely short of supplies, artillery and ammunition. Both the Russians the the Chinese, I think, are determined to avoid a world conflict and pursue, by penetration, the gradual disintegration of the West. I think that this would be the view of the Foreign Office and probably the State Department at Washington as well.

But, there is no prospect at all of getting a joint and complete settlement with Russia, although we may be able to treat with the Russians on particular issues to ease the tension in particular places. When the tension becomes too much for them you can get a temporary settlement, but I think it is vain to hope that at any time within the next ten or fifteen years we can get the kind of settlement with Russia which will lead to a general relaxation and a substantial reduction of armaments. I feel we are in for a long period of strain, of little Koreas, of big Malayas, wherever the Russians promote conflict - particularly in Asia where, for a variety of reasons, the opportunities are so much greater.

The Russian policy is based on these two assumptions, and on the necessity of turmoil - the greater the turmoil the greater the opportunity. If, in fact, we are compelled to spend the greater part of the Treasurer's budget on defence we have so much less available for social functions. This now is a fairly accepted view: and we are likely to be in for a period of perhaps twenty or thirty years of tension and strain, and we should be thankful if out of this there does not arise by some miscalculation another world war.

In such a situation what should Western policy be? The quality we need is patience - especially patience at the Conference table. One of the most encouraging aspects of the denouement in Korea - at those interminable Panmunjon peace talks in Korea - the extent to which has been provoked by the Chinese and the North Koreans again and again - is the remarkable patience of the United Nations. We shall have to exercise similar patience with the Russians or Chinese for a long time!

The dictators

The dictators can go on arguing and discussing and playing for time and to meet this situation the great quality we need, I believe, is patience at the Conference table.

We may have to be prepared to carry this process on by abortive Conference after abortive Conference for some twenty or thirty years. But, at the same time, we must always be prepared for war if it breaks out! - we must be prepared for the kind of war that starts not without warning, but on comparatively short notice. That is why we must maintain large armies in Germany. That is why we dare not fall behind in the development of new weapons and the whole range of scientific military developments.

All this involves a double burden upon the Western powers, because the kind of weapons you will need in any European conflict are quite useless to you for dealing with communist penetration in Malaya. There is the further dilemma that every pound spent on military defence reduces our power to develop the undeveloped areas! The time has come when certainly in Britain, and within the next year in the United States, there will have to be a serious reconsideration of the balance between military and economic expenditure. The amount spent against communism by the Western powers in the last year is something like one fiftieth of the amount spent in military defence. We are going to meet this long term threat of communism we have got to get that balance better adjusted. In Asia we have the opportunity of developing a way of life superior to anything that can be offered by the communists.

I think there is a danger, not so much of the Russians or the Americans deliberately starting a war, but of a situation developing out of American impatience and impetuosity. One heard it from Americans quite a lot in 1950 and 1951. Last year one heard not much of it. We must think in more positive terms of liberating Eastern Europe.

It is impossible to foretell at this stage what critical situation may develop in the Far East: and unfortunately you have in power at the moment an administration in the United States which listens to those who talk in terms of "getting tough with China". Certainly the reaction in Britain and Europe to American attitudes is one of profound disappointment. We feel in London and Washington that President Eisenhower is skating all round the main problems! And at times it looks as if the American system just does not work. America's allies, therefore, should be in a position to restrain. Britain can only play this role effectively if she is solidly backed by the Commonwealth.

Do not think I am suggesting America is going to lead us into war: what is true is, that the Americans are both impatient and impetuous, and unless there is a restraining and guiding hand we may get some action by the United States - something may get out of hand.

Looking at the Commonwealth from London, one gets the feeling that the development of independence in certain Dominions has gone rather too far. I do not mean that there should be any subjection of the Dominions to jurisdiction from London. At the same time, if we are to play our part in this world then the mere weight of Britain or the individual parts of the Commonwealth is not sufficient to carry much influence. It seems to me that we are very gravely in danger of being faced with a world which is irrecoverably divided.

The dictators can go on arguing and discussing and playing for time: and to meet this situation the great quality we need, I believe, is patience at the Conference table.

We may have to be prepared to carry this process on by abortive Conference after abortive Conference for some twenty or thirty years. But, at the same time, we must always be prepared for war if it breaks out! - we must be prepared for the kind of war that starts not without warning, but on comparatively short notice. That is why we must maintain large armies in Germany. That is why we dare not fall behind in the development of new weapons and the whole range of scientific military developments.

All this involves a double burden upon the Western powers, because the kind of weapons you will need in any European conflict are quite useless to you for dealing with communist penetration in Malaya. There is the further dilemma that every pound spent on military defence reduces our power to develop the undeveloped areas! The time has come when certainly in Britain, and within the next year in the United States, there will have to be a serious reconsideration of the balance between military and economic expenditure. The amount spent against communism by the Western powers in the last year is something like one fiftieth of the amount spent in military defence. If we are going to meet this long term threat of communism we have got to get that balance better adjusted. In Asia we have the opportunity of developing a way of life superior to anything that can be offered by the communists.

I think there is a danger, not so much of the Russians or the Americans deliberately starting a war, but of a situation developing out of American impudence and impetuosity. One heard it from Americans quite a lot in 1950 and 1951. Last year one heard not much of it. We must think in more positive terms of liberating Eastern Europe.

It is impossible to foretell at this stage what critical situation may develop in the Far East: and unfortunately you have in power at the moment an administration in the United States which listens to those who talk in terms of "getting tough with China". Certainly the reaction in Britain and Europe to American attitudes is one of profound disappointment. We feel in London and Washington that President Eisenhower is skating all round the main problems! And at times it looks as if the American system just does not work. America's allies, therefore, should be in a position to restrain. Britain can only play this role effectively if she is solidly backed by the Commonwealth.

Do not think I am suggesting America is going to lead us into war: what is true is, that the Americans are both impatient and impetuous, and unless there is a restraining and guiding hand we may get some action by the United States - something may get out of hand.

Looking at the Commonwealth from London, one gets the feeling that the development of independence in certain Dominions has gone rather too far. I do not mean that there should be any subjection of the Dominions to jurisdiction from London. At the same time, if we are to play our part in this world then the mere weight of Britain or the individual parts of the Commonwealth is not sufficient to carry much influence. It seems to me that we are very gravely in danger of being faced with a world which is irrecoverably divided.

Now, if we in

they need to maintain their export trade. Britain will be in danger of being left with unskilled labourers and old age pensioners.

Turn from the economic question to the strategic. If war does come, Britain will be inevitably more vulnerable than she has been in the past. If an aggressor were to attack with atomic weapons, many ports would be closed for many months. Exploding a bomb in the hull of a ship in a harbour would close that harbour for very many months because of the lingering radio activity which would be left behind in the explosion - quite apart from the question of atomic explosions in harbours. There is, in fact, no answer to the V2: the long range rocket. The Germans launched their rocket from Holland. The Russians could bombard London from territory they already hold. Rockets of that kind could create unbelievable devastation in these great centres of population. Britain is the obvious target.

You have what is regarded in Britain now as the biggest question mark, and that is this - We do know of the ferocity of atomic development - the Russians went straight for the Hydrogen bomb: but for some reason they have not bothered to develop the atomic weapon through its various stages. The Russians have tried and possibly succeeded in producing the Hydrogen bomb: but the Russians have no night fighter forces - they have day fighters. But they have not developed any night fighter force for the defence of Soviet cities. We can discover no evidence at all of this. The Russians have functional bombers like the American B29, but no inter-continental bomber; no means by which they could reply to the American long range inter-continental bomber. Have the Russians skipped that phase of development? Nobody knows. But the fact is, that whether they have or not, the rockets they have developed since the war make Britain the most vulnerable target in the whole of the Western world. We should in the time that is left to us embark upon a really bold and large scale programme of moving people, commercial factories to Australia, Canada, South Africa.

Now I would like to say a few words about Australian development. I do not profess for a moment to be an expert because I am obviously talking to people who live here but it does seem to me we have seen an extraordinary transformation in the public approach in Australia to the question of migration. There is no longer a deep grudge or political agitation against migration. But, whereas the target was originally two hundred thousand a year, it is now down to 100,000, or even less. Surely unless Australia can find a means of absorbing more migrants her moral authority to maintain the White Australia Policy will disappear.

Knowing this then, 250,000 people a year is not going to give us the resources, and our claim to develop them in our own way. At the root of this problem is the question of food production, - population is up twenty-five percent since 1939 - food production has gone up nineteen percent. Since we have estimated that by 1960 we shall have 11,000,000 people in Australia, there will have to be faster increases in food production to maintain that population. But surely it is not sufficient for Australia merely to grow enough food to maintain her population. We need capital resources and the primary means of gaining those capital resources surely is by maintaining a flourishing export trade. How this might be done is the problem we have to get down to - one way is, that if we are going to be able to absorb 1/4 million people a year, there may have to be some kind of control of investment - we must have sufficient capital to maintain irrigation schemes, roads, transport, schools, mines and hospitals. Are we in Australia at this time accumulating sufficient capital to maintain

the kind

the kind of development that we must have ? A rough glance at the figures suggests a negative reply ! To absorb so many migrants in the next five years with a shortage of capital is going to grow increasingly severe.

I know this may be extremely unpopular with people interested in sheep and wool: but in the problem of accumulation of capital resources for the development of the country, I suggest we might learn from Burma, where the entire rice crop is taken over and sold by the Government. The Burmese Government buys the rice grown, milled, marketed, F.O.B. for a given sum - and sells the surplus to the world at a profit; and this profit is used for Burmese development. If, in fact, this had been done with Australia wool, we would have had a vast fund available for the development of hydro-electric schemes, for the general development of the country, and the absorption of migrants from abroad. Money is eventually taken back through taxation only after every possible penny is being spent - an uneconomic and unscientific way of acquiring money for development. Surely there is in Australia a very great opportunity now with the discovery of Uranium. If, in fact, all the proceeds which are earned were used for capital development in Australia, then surely we would have found the means of financing the schemes we need to make this country great. However, I merely throw this thought out as a suggestion. What I want mainly to emphasise is, that you must develop: and you must find the means to that end. England is bowed down heavily with defence obligations, and you cannot expect huge funds from there !

The Migration Council in London is a small body of private individuals who are chiefly concerned with influencing public policy favourable to large-scale migration, winning over members of Parliament and leading Public Servants. It is supported by a number of British firms who make funds available to the Migration Council for publicity purposes and to maintain a small organisation. Although the organisation is not substantial, it has succeeded in getting Parliament to devote a good deal of attention to this problem of Migration. The main difficulty is to persuade Whitehall that massed migration is not going to be the ruination of Britain. I do urge you most strongly to think up what can be done by private action. In the future surely we can form organisations in the various Capital Cities of Australia that will advocate this cause and work for it. If we can strengthen the Commonwealth economically, the Commonwealth as a whole, and Britain in particular, can play a strong role in foreign affairs: and then we can look with some confidence to the future economically. We can, and we must, play the role with greater authority and greater power than at the present time. And it's up to you ! You have enough men of influence and capacity in this room tonight to do this. As I scanned the list of guests which Sir Bertram so quickly got together, I see the names of many who have already given great service: and of many young men who must be just longing to do something to give a sense of urgency to this problem of peopling and developing this land of great promise.

..... o O o

INTRODUCTION.

Introducing Mr. Wilmot, the Chairman, Sir Bertram Stevens said :

The fact that you gentlemen have, at this particular time of the year, and at such short notice, accepted the invitation to join with me in honouring our distinguished guest, is a tribute to the high place he holds in your esteem. I am aware that many of you, indeed, have cancelled other engagements so that you may meet in person and honour one - who may in terms of years be referred to as a young Australian - who has distinguished himself in so many fields of service.

This is a gathering of unique composition: of the fifty-two present, just about half are of Chester Wilmot's vintage; and, indeed, some of you are younger. Regardless of age - whether you be as young as the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Les Atkinson - or at or near the more senior age level of the distinguished leader of Trade and Commerce in this community who sits on my left, Sir Charles Lloyd-Jones - each of you carries high executive responsibility and leadership in some particular field.

I have a special interest in our honoured guest. From personal contact I got to know something of the worth of his special service in the Eastern theatres of war: and I well recall - as no doubt some of you do - those occasions when at eventide in the lonely places of the East - of Egypt or India - the voices of two young Australians could be clearly heard in the B.B.C. broadcasts from London and from the European war centres: one the voice of George Ivan Smith whom the Australian Broadcasting Commission seconded to the B.B.C. to tell the story of London's reaction to the changing and darkening pattern of war; the other, the ever vibrant voice of our guest, Chester Wilmot, coming from Normandy and other battlefields in the European zones to which the B.B.C. had sent him! And: it is good to recall that our guest who lived through these hazardous days, has ever since constantly been in touch with us through broadcast and press articles and through historical monumental records.

Some of you have known Chester Wilmot over many years: Charles Moses, General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, who right from the start both personally and through his organisation consistently showed his faith in his great capacity and sense of duty; Daniel McVey, now in control of some of our major industrial enterprises, but formerly of the P.M.G.'s Department, arranged and witnessed Wilmot's first broadcast and, as he told me, predicted a great future for him; and our good friend, Lieut. General Eric Woodward - to whom I know you would have me convey our congratulations on his present appointment as G.O.C. of Eastern Command - knew our guest's work at first hand in many a theatre of war, and who has always had faith in him.

Some of you have known our guest as journalist: historian: or ever-welcome broadcaster: or through his brilliant publications - particularly that monumental effort "The Struggle for Europe": some of you have known him through earlier associations of Australian colleges and Universities. Some of you too, have been privileged to enjoy the close association of his loyal and warm friendship.

Latterly, I personally have got to know Chester Wilmot because of his membership and lively interest in the British Migration Council - about whose very worthy objectives he will speak briefly to us this evening.

Whatever the

Whatever the background of our knowledge of this distinguished guest - each of us, on this unique occasion - has come to meet and pay personal tribute to an Australian who has made good; and, who in a few short years, has by dint of rare qualities of mind and heart, and amazing capacity for hard work - for discovering the truth through patient and continuous research - has reached a position of authority and influence in the fields of international diplomacy and relationships, and military strategy.

ooooooo O ooooooo