THE COLONIAL QUESTION

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The colonial question has been pushed into the background for the present, but it *was* a question of great significance at the close of the last war, and will again demand the most careful consideration of statesmen when the present war is over.

If the Axis powers should win, there would be no use to discuss the colonial question. We know that their desire is to reduce the whole world to slavery. We shall then discuss the question with the assumption that the United Nations will win. In the first place, some would question the right of any nation to have political dominion over other people and other lands. The principle of "Self-Determination" advocated in the speeches of Woodrow Wilson aroused desire and expectation among people of many lands, and living under various forms of political domination. Some are inclined to say let all the different peoples govern themselves. All liberal thinkers will agree that each people fit to govern themselves should be allowed to do so. Many will go farther and state that even "a second-rate government under native control is better than a first rate government under foreign control."[1] There still remain, however, many places in the world where even second-rate control may not be realized. Some islands and patches of land in other places are too small for responsible governments. Some people are too ignorant or too low in the scale of human development to govern themselves. If left to themselves, they might on the one hand, be subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment by native rulers, and in the second place they would probably impinge upon the more orderly portions of the world in such a way as to bring injury to the outside world. An example of such was the uncontrolled slave raids formerly made by Arabs of Northern Africa upon the negroes of the Sudan. Another, was the piracy practiced, for a time, by the Barbary States against the nations of Western Europe and even the United States. Another example is the exportation of opium by Iran. As the world communications become more closely knit, the spread of contagious diseases from low grade people, with no knowledge of sanitation, must be controlled. It is safe to conclude therefore that there still must be colonial government.

Germany and Italy have demanded colonies as outlets for their excess populations. In the first place, people from temperate lands do not wish to colonize tropical lands, but seek out new homes in independent countries in temperate lands. In the second place the rulers of Italy and Germany are not sincere, because they heap praise and even prizes upon mothers who bring forth large families.

From an economic standpoint colonies do not pay. Libya costs the poverty stricken people of Italy four times as much as is received from it. Other colonial powers show deficits also. Even if an annual expense and receipt account shows that the expense is not larger, the long time expense of conquest, development and control makes the colony an expense upon the people of the governing power.

Another reason for the desire for colonies is the prestige value. This of course is foolish and of no value and cannot be defended. It is, nevertheless, probably the most impelling reason behind the desire of Mussolini, Hitler, and of the Japanese. Against this foolish childish impulse we are today at war.

The statement that colonies almost always do not return to the governing country as much as they cost is almost universally true. This does not necessarily imply that no one may receive benefit from the colony. In fact, in almost every colony some favored individual may receive a liberal profit. Here again, the British may serve as an example. In spite of being a democratic country, the government is controlled very largely by the aristocratic class and the wealthy element. The younger sons of the aristocratic class need well paying jobs that are not beneath their dignity. Appointment to administrative positions

[1] Bowman, Isaiah—The New World, pp. 109-110.

with good salaries and other advantages often solves the problem of what to do with the younger sons. More important advantages may be secured by wealthy men and great corporations, who may receive valuable concessions to develop mineral deposits or other natural resources of the colony, at little cost to themselves, because of their preponderating influence with the government of the ruling power. In fact some members of the government may also be members of the corporation receiving the concession. In this case some few people may receive great profit at the expense not only of colony, but at the expense of the more numerous poorer people of their own country. This is one of the chief roots of imperialism, and statesmen of the future should see that special favor for privileged groups should have no place in the governments of free people.

The League of Nations, in spite of its faults and other weaknesses, advanced the idea upon which future colonial government must be based, if the idealism advanced as the program of the United Nations prevails. This is that the paramount purpose of colonial government is the welfare and well being of the colonial people. The Mandate System set up by the League of Nations, although administered imperfectly, called not only for government for the benefit of the people, but also called for an accounting, at stated intervals, by the governing country, to the League of Nations. These advanced ideas, should not be allowed to perish. They are the fruits of the highest development of the colonial system. This system, under the Romans, was little removed from slavery, in the early development of the colonial empires of Western Europe, the colony existed solely to be exploited by the governing country, and only slowly did the idea develop in the world that the welfare of the people of the colony should have first consideration. Kipling's "White Man's Burden" idea has long been considered a hypocritical excuse for British imperialism, but at long last, after Kipling's time has the new idea received the best consideration in the British colonies. After the British come the French who also have been working to a certain extent for the benefit of the natives.

One of the demands of the Axis powers, before the start of the present war, was for colonies. They made much of the "Have nots" and the "Haves" and while we now know, they were only using this as a plausible excuse for their desire to dominate other lands, they led many to believe that there was some justification for their demands. Let us examine the reasons put forward in the demands or desires for colonies. To understand these demands, the location of the colonial territories should be indicated. They are all in the hot belt of the world. The group of greatest importance from the standpoint of area and population are intertropical Africa, Second, the islands and peninsulas of southeastern Asia, Third, the West Indies and the Guianas, Fourth, the desert and semi-arid lands of northern Africa and western Asia. The development of the colonial system of today came from an economic impulse, from a world whose great powers were strong nationalistic states.

An important reason given for having colonies is the need for food and raw materials for industry, together with a market for manufactured articles. In order to help the metropolitan country, custom dues and other measures of preference must be established in its favor, both in buying and in selling. This has been done by some of the colonizing powers, least of all by the British who have been most successful. The curtailment of trade thus brought about by tariff preferment does not help, but hinders the well being of the colony. There has been in recent years a surplus, not a deficiency, in colonial products. There were products for all who had the money or the goods with which to buy. It does not require political dominion to do business with colonies. Furthermore the sources of most of the food and raw materials as well as the markets for manufactured goods are in independent countries. A reason behind the commercial one is the desire to control the products in time of war. Even this is not a valid reason because an enemy can cut off the colony from the metropolitan country and secure its products. Striking examples are the Netherland Indies which cannot supply rubber and quinine to the Netherlands, and Malaya which cannot supply Britain with rubber and tin. With a world organized on a basis of peace, this excuse for colonies is not valid.