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The British Council and the British World, 1939-1954

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> In the cause of good international understanding, within the Empire and without it; for the sake of our export trade; in the interests of our tourist traffic; above all, perhaps, in the discharge of our great responsibilities to the other countries of the Commonwealth of British peoples, we must master the art of national projection.[1]

So wrote the secretary of the Empire Marketing Board, Stephen Tallents, in his 1932 essay, *The Projection of England*. This publication helped to bolster the case of those in Whitehall who had been seeking for some time to convince the British government of the necessity of funding some form of "cultural propaganda." However, it was the rise of fascism and Nazism, combined with intense economic competition, which finally led the British government to set up an arms-length institution. Thus, when the British Council was founded in 1934, Foreign Office priorities determined its principal targets: Europe, the Middle East and South America. Despite this fact the official objectives of the Council clearly left the way open for it to play a role in the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth, setting it the task of "strengthening the common cultural tradition of the British Commonwealth" (White 7). Echoing Tallents, its mission was defined as follows: "To make the life and thought of the British peoples more widely known abroad; and to promote a mutual interchange of knowledge and ideas with other peoples." Whilst recognizing the self-governing status of the Dominions and the need for a collaborative approach, the use

of the plural "British peoples" also raised the possibility that the British Council might seek to "project" not only the United Kingdom but also other countries of the British world. It may be recalled that until 1946 all Commonwealth citizens enjoyed the same nationality, that of British subjects.[2]

This essay examines some of the problems encountered by the Council while seeking to extend its activity in the British world and particularly in two of the "old Dominions," Canada and Australia. The period covered is that of the earliest part of the Council's history, from the late 1930s, through World War Two and the post-war period into the mid-1950s, when the Drogheda Report (1954) led to a major rethink of Council policy. It was a period which witnessed a major change both in the way the Council was perceived and the way it perceived itself. Commonwealth attitudes towards the British Council, and indeed towards Britain generally, played a crucial role which cannot be fully explored here: this article is based primarily on British archives and as such presents the British perspective. Further research in the target countries may in time enable us to complete this picture.

The Early Years and World War Two

The British Council was set up with a grant of a mere £6000 from the Treasury. Its earliest years were therefore devoted to building up an administrative structure and increasing its funds. The British Council began to expand in 1937 following the appointment of Lord Lloyd as its Chairman. A former governor of Bombay and High Commissioner to Egypt, Lloyd was a convinced Imperialist who was determined not to limit the Council to work in foreign countries. It may also be noted that the two deputy secretaries-general appointed at this time hailed respectively from the Foreign Office and from the Indian Civil Service. Although priority had to be given to those colonial dependencies where the threat posed by foreign propaganda appeared most acute, the Council was determined to start developing a programme with the Dominions at the earliest opportunity.[3]

Initial discussions during the summer of 1939 highlighted some of the difficulties that were to dog the Council in its attempts to pursue this goal. The Dominions Office had appointed a liaison officer to work with the British Council as

early as 1934, recognising that the Council had a legitimate role to play in Commonwealth relations. Nevertheless it was reluctant to lend its support to any development in the Dominions. The Secretary of State for the Dominions, Sir Thomas Inskip, warned Lloyd that any form of centralised Empire propaganda would be unacceptable to the Dominion governments, although the promotion of inter-Imperial cultural relations might prove easier. He nevertheless agreed that the Council could make preliminary enquiries.[4] Meetings with the High Commissioners of Canada and Australia indicated that the Council was perceived ambivalently by the Dominions themselves. The Canadian High Commissioner in London, Vincent Massey, expressed interest but considered that an official connection with the Council was impossible. He offered "behind the scenes" support and suggested that the Council approach Major Ney of the Canadian National Council of Education and Overseas Education League.[5] The Australian High Commissioner agreed to a limited role for the Council in his country, stating his preference for industrial over academic exchange which he considered "too dangerous"![6]

Undeterred, the Council proceeded with plans to extend its press and film activities to the Dominions. However, following the outbreak of war, the Council found itself faced with a new obstacle in the form of the Ministry of Information, which was equally determined to operate in the Dominions. The Council gained a large advantage over the new ministry when Lord Lloyd was appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1940. The Council had in fact begun operations in some colonies before the war as part of its Near East program. Despite Lloyd's death early in 1941, the Colonial Office continued to support an increased role for the Council in the colonies, and representatives were appointed in Africa and the West Indies in order to co-ordinate this expansion. A new Empire Division was also created later that year, headed by Sir Angus Gillan from the Sudan Service. Yet throughout the war, the Dominions Office, like the India Office, refused to sanction any expansion of the Council's work, preferring simply to use certain of its services regarding books, films, exhibitions and scholarships (White 40).

The Council remained nevertheless committed to building up links with the Commonwealth, and its Royal Charter (1940) specifically assigned to it the "purpose

of benefitting the British Commonwealth of Nations."[7] Another series of meetings with the Dominion High Commissioners in December 1940, organised without prior consultation with the Dominions office, proved largely inconclusive. A year later, the Secretary of State for the Dominions, Lord Cranborne, wrote to the Council's Chairman reminding him that no new work was to be undertaken in the Dominions until the end of the war was in sight, to avoid provoking criticism of the UK.[8] This did not prevent Robertson from sending letters of introduction for Gillan, the recently appointed head of the Empire Division, to the High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada in order that they might meet to discuss expansion.[9] All agreed in principle that the Council had a role to play in the Dominions but that no action should be taken until after the war.[10]

A number of factors combined effectively to bar the British Council from establishing itself in the Dominions before and during the Second World War: the FO did not consider them sufficiently important, the Treasury did not wish to fund such activity and the relevant government departments were suspicious of the Council and preferred to maintain control of all information work. Furthermore, it was debateable whether the methods which were applied in foreign countries, and in some colonies, would be either suitable for, or welcome in, the Dominions. As Gillan noted in a report produced in 1943:

> Even if an institutional system under British Council representatives were to be acceptable to Dominion opinion, which is highly doubtful, it would be impossible to cover the whole field; there would be almost inevitable over-lapping with High Commissioners' Publicity Offices, and however carefully Council staff were selected there would be ample opportunities for friction.[11]

If the Council wished to establish a Commonwealth programme it would have to develop a new approach.

Projecting the British nations

The lack of representatives in the Dominions did not prevent the Council from communicating about the Empire, nor from seeking to strengthen cultural relations within it. However, this was far from virgin territory and much exchange already existed in those areas which particularly interested the Council: the press and films, education and the arts.[12] It risked, moreover, finding itself in competition with organisations such as the Imperial Relations Trust, founded in 1937 with the aim of reinforcing ties between the UK and the Dominions. Indeed, certain members of the Royal Empire Society would later urge the Dominions Office to keep the Council out of the Dominions in order to leave the field free for voluntary societies.[13] Yet leading voices within the Council believed strongly in its imperial mission.

As has already been noted, it was still possible to imagine that the British Council could promote the culture of individual Dominions, to the extent that they could be considered to express the "life and thought of the British peoples." Yet defining and promoting a shared British culture was fraught with difficulties. Thus the Palace of Arts at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 had served to highlight nascent national identities as much as a common "Empire art" (August 44). Interestingly, the first suggestion that the British Council might take on such a responsibility came not from within the Council itself but from Canada House. It was requested that a selection of paintings from the 1938 Tate exhibition *A Century of Canadian Art* be exhibited abroad by the Council. The Council rejected the proposal, which nevertheless sparked debate among its staff, with one officer being moved to declare "Surely Canadian Art *is* British art."[14] It is unclear to what extent the Canadian request was grounded in a belief that Canadian art was a subset of a wider British tradition. It seems more likely that it was a pragmatic attempt to finance the promotion of Canadian art. Indeed, the building up of national cultural institutions in Canada during the 1930s had benefitted greatly from American funds through the Carnegie Corporation and Rockefeller Foundation, as well from smaller British contributions (Tippett 143-154).[15] The same organisations were also active in Australia (Alomes 69).[16]

The idea that the Council might take on the "projection" of other "British nations" resurfaced from time to time. The distribution of Australian materials by the British Council was discussed with the Australian High Commissioner in 1939.[17] On a smaller scale, the director of the Anglophile Society in Rio de Janeiro, who shortly afterwards became the Council's representative in Brazil, succeeded in developing a Canadian section in his library using materials supplied by the Canadian Trade Commission.[18] Massey also evoked the possibility of Anglo-Canadian co-operation in South America.[19] Near the end of the war, an Australian Council officer based in Jerusalem tried to convince the London office to include "Australian examples of British achievements" in travelling exhibitions. He also argued in favour of developing a true partnership with Australia, thereby "making [the Council] more a British Council in the widest imperial sense."[20] Although there is no evidence to suggest that any of his suggestions were acted on, his was not a lone voice. Galvanised by the support of the Australian politician Richard Casey, who was acting as the British Minister resident in the Middle East, the Chairman of the British Council went so far as to announce to the House of Commons that he hoped one day to turn the Council into the "British Empire Council."[21] Such a position had never had the support of the Dominions Office, who resented the Council's repeated efforts to establish contact directly with the Dominion governments.[22] The question was ultimately settled in 1944, when a meeting of the High Commissioners with various departments, including the Dominions Office and the Ministry of Information, agreed that it was for each autonomous Dominion to carry out its own "projection" in the UK and abroad.[23]

Dominion Councils

The British Council was widely seen as a propaganda organisation both abroad and at home and this proved a major obstacle in persuading the Dominions to work with it.[24] The Council was aware of this, and the idea was even mooted of setting up an alternative body to work with the Dominions.[25] If the Council was to overcome Dominion suspicions it had to emphasise the reciprocal nature of its work. Yet the Council not only suffered from lack of representation in the Dominions, it also

struggled to find similar bodies with which it could work in setting up any kind of two-way cultural traffic. In the case of Canada, Massey repeatedly suggested that the Council should work through the National Council of Education, but this was unsatisfactory from the Council's point of view as discussions with its head, Major Ney, had proved their positions to be divergent and Ney "quite hopeless to deal with."[26]

From his appointment in 1941, Angus Gillan sought to develop an alternative strategy. This was to encourage the creation of Dominion Councils similar to the British Council in the hope that these "collateral councils" could act as both the consultants and agents of the British Council. The creation of a network of councils would enable it to develop projects in the Dominions without having to establish its own offices there. Moreover, the question of the British Council representing the Dominions would cease to arise. The Dominion Councils could collaborate with the Council whilst interacting with one another. This project held obvious attractions for the British Council: it would be cheaper than sending staff abroad and would bypass the UK High Commissioners who could potentially veto such representation anyway. It was also intended as a way of extending the Council's influence in the Empire-Commonwealth without antagonising the Dominions. The Council clearly imagined a leading role for itself: it was envisaged that in such a system the "Empire side" of the British Council would "become recognised as a real Empire cultural clearing house."[27]

War conditions proved oddly favourable to the pursuit of this policy. Firstly, the Council hoped that an attempt at rapprochement would be more favourably received in time of war. A report from January 1940 argued that, "it is easier for us to dwell upon the theme of Imperial unity when the Dominions themselves have asserted that unity in the most striking manner possible than it is to do so when the initiative has to come entirely from our side." The same report went on to identify a "supreme opportunity" afforded by the war, namely the presence in the UK of Dominion troops.[28] Massey advised the Council to use this opportunity to make itself known to the Canadians.[29] The Home Division was built up for this purpose and by 1942 was arranging and paying for university courses, organising visits, teaching

English to French Canadians and showing news reels in camps. This programme was devised with the Council's long-term aims in mind; as the Executive Committee was informed, the Council was not only interpreting Great Britain to the Canadians, it was also "interesting them generally in the work of the Council so that they might be encouraged to do something similar for themselves."[30]

Early in 1942, an anonymous gift of £10,000 for strengthening cultural links between the UK and Canada provided the Council with an opportunity to take more active steps in stimulating the formation of a Canadian body similar to the British Council.[31] Michael Huxley, formerly the British press attaché at the Washington Embassy, was sent on an exploratory tour of Canada, where he was greeted with "a mixture of sympathy and suspicion."[32] His mission was considered particularly important as its outcome would affect Council policy in all the Dominions. Indeed it was foreseen that a Canadian body might act as a prototype for other Dominion councils.[33]

Huxley recommended the establishment of what became the Canadian Committee, whose main task would be to "interpret" Canada to the Commonwealth forces based there. At the request of the Canadian Committee, F. A. Gray of the Council's Empire Division was seconded to act as their Assistant Secretary, but the two organisations were not formally linked.[34] The head of the Empire Division, Angus Gillan, was sufficiently pleased with the initial success of this project to claim in 1943: "the inauguration in Canada of a collateral body carrying out work similar to that of the British Council and capable of acting in co-operation with the latter in matters of common interest has been achieved."[35]

The Canadian Committee did not however continue to expand in the way that the Council had hoped. By 1944 Gillan was forced to reassess the results obtained:

> So far they are so busy putting their own house in order that the last thing they are likely to think of is to do anything for us. We are on very good terms with them as long as we do not go further than this, but there have been obvious signs of suspicion of any form of Council intervention or patronage.[36]

The gulf widened once the Committee became the Canada Foundation in May 1945. Unlike other cultural organisations formed in Canada during the war, such as the Arts Liaison Committee, the Foundation's position was that private individuals rather than the government should be responsible for developing cultural activities. The Canada Foundation was dominated by Walter Herbert who, although he favoured promoting Canadian culture abroad, later advised the Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce *against* the formation of a Canada Council along the lines of the British Council (Tippett 172-178).

Post-war policy

Given the failure, at least from the Council's point of view, of the Canadian Committee experiment, Gillan was forced to reopen the debate on how best to work in and with the Dominions: should they aim at official representation or simply employ "Dominion men" to open offices which would distribute Council material? By January 1945, Gillan had come to the conclusion that although the creation of Dominion Councils remained the long-term objective, the Council had to have "representation on the spot."[37] The British Council began to make tentative steps towards establishing its presence in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. Gillan was wary of arousing the suspicions of the Dominion governments and the Council therefore advanced cautiously, seeking official invitations.[38] Although not necessarily hostile to the British Council, they were not sufficiently enthusiastic to issue formal invitations. It was difficult for the Council to overcome official inertia; as a sympathetic contact at Australia House commented to a New Zealander employed by the Council: "You know the difficulty from your own experience in getting Governments, particularly Dominion Governments, to move in these matters."[39]

The Dominions Office's position was not entirely hostile. At a meeting to discuss future publicity work held in October 1944, the possibility of using the Council as an agent was discussed.[40] Yet by the end of the war the Dominions Office

was once again resisting the Council's attempts to establish itself in the Dominions, arguing that,

> The Council is exclusively concerned with presenting this country on the cultural side and the culture of the Dominions—except perhaps in French Canada and amongst Afrikaans-speaking South Africans—is fundamentally the same as our own. The people of the Dominions do not need the Council to teach them English, nor do they need to have explained to them our basic institutions, or (at the other extreme), the way in which the English take their meals.[41]

The Dominions Office continued to perceive the Council as being primarily concerned with "national projection" yet the experience of the war had led to a shift in the way in which the Council interpreted its mission. The Council's work with refugees and its involvement in the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (the forerunner of UNESCO) had led to a new approach to cultural relations, which placed less emphasis on spreading the "British way of life" and more on reciprocity and mutual comprehension (Haigh 41-52).[42] The Council's commitment to building equal and reciprocal cultural relations with the Dominions would nevertheless continue to be regarded with a large degree of distrust as the organisation was still seen through the lens of its origins.

South Africa was assigned the lowest priority among Commonwealth countries. The political situation and the introduction of apartheid meant that the Council more or less abandoned the idea of starting work there until the late 1950s. In the case of Australia, the Council managed to circumvent the Dominions Office opposition by re-establishing direct contact with the Australian High Commissioner. Although Stanley Bruce was far from an enthusiastic advocate of the Council he did believe that it would be "quite fatal" for the Council to work through the Information Services. More importantly, he showed an interest in collaborating with the Council in presenting the "British point of view" in the Pacific.[43] This served as a pretext for Gillan to organize a visit to Australia with the reluctant blessing of the Dominions

Office.[44] Such a trip was an opportunity to persuade the Australians of the potential benefits of allowing the Council to begin operations there. Gillan was also confident that New Zealand would follow Australia's lead.[45] His tour of these countries in 1945 resulted in both governments inviting the Council to establish offices and its first representatives arrived in 1947.

It was hoped that the official Council Representatives in Australia and New Zealand would be better placed to encourage these countries to set up their own councils. Public speeches, the press and personal contacts were all used to this end. The *Australian Observer* endorsed Charles Wilmot's suggestion that Australia should have its own Council, arguing that this would gain the respect of others and increase the self-respect of Australians.[46] In New Zealand the cause was taken up by the president of the New Zealand Drama Council.[47] Yet in neither country was there sufficient interest or political will for such proposals to become serious projects. Australia's Department of External Affairs was created a year after the British Council and Stephen Alomes argues that in the sphere of international cultural relations Australia remained subject to a "colonial cultural lag" (Alomes 70). Yet the British Council's failure to generate new councils also indicates the limits of its influence as neither Australia nor New Zealand were quick to follow the British example set before. It must also be remembered that the British Council could not even be sure of full support within the United Kingdom itself and that its long-term future was not secured until the 1950s.

It proved much harder for the British Council to gain access to Canada due to opposition from the Treasury and the UK High Commissioner in Canada, Sir Alexander Clutterbuck. Clutterbuck claimed that there was still "a certain amount of prejudice against the British Council and its work, largely on the grounds that it was designed for projecting British culture to foreign and Colonial peoples."[48] The recently appointed head of the new Commonwealth Division, Sir Shuldham Redfern, disagreed, believing that Canadian suspicions were "illusory." In his opinion, the principal obstacle remained the fact that the High Commissioner was "obviously afraid of the Council treading on the toes of the Information Office."[49] Redfern later

reported to Gillan that the director of the Information Office opposed the Council functioning in Canada at all.[50]

Redfern adopted a conciliatory approach towards the High Commissioner whilst working hard to obtain support from the Canadian Government. The attitude of the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, was described as "encouraging" and Canada House even went so far as to suggest a potential candidate for the post of Council representative but the government would not extend a formal invitation.[51] It was, however, the deepening financial crisis which put paid to the idea of establishing a Council representative in Ottawa.[52] Canada, with Newfoundland, was unique among Empire-Commonwealth countries in being outside the sterling area. As the UK's dollar reserves dwindled, the Treasury was particularly reluctant to sanction any activity there. Clutterbuck was able to veto a proposed visit by Redfern in 1947 by arguing that such a visit "might give rise to misunderstanding on the part of the public here and result in embarrassment" due to the dollar crisis.[53] Undeterred, Redfern sought to appeal directly to the Canadians, attempting first to win over the Canadian High Commissioner.[54] As former Secretary to the Governor General of Canada, Redfern had a broad network of contacts which he mobilised in the hope of gaining positive coverage of the Council in the Canadian press. In a letter to the editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*, Redfern worked to dispel the notion that the Council's object was to "spread propaganda of the Cecil Rhodes – Kipling variety; in other words a sort of veiled imperialism." He also requested that Bowman show the letter to the press magnate Harry Southam (described as "my old friend") and to any of Bowman's colleagues.[55]

Redfern was finally able to tour Canada a year later with the blessing of the Canadian government.[56] He reassured Clutterbuck that the idea of establishing a Council office was out of the question "in the immediate future" and even dared hope that British Council activities in Canada could *earn* dollars.[57] Subsequently, as the export drive took off, the Council also found allies in the Dollar Export Agency and the Board of Trade who were primarily interested in the Council's capacity to influence North Americans in such a way as to stimulate exports of British goods and capital equipment.[58] Yet the Council was ill-equipped to produce the hard evidence

needed for it to obtain dollars and its officers at times showed a certain disdain for developing economic and trade arguments.[59]

Following his trip, Redfern recommended working with the High Commissioner's Information Office and developing direct contacts between the UK and Canada rather than sending a representative. He suggested a budget of £3, 000 would suffice. The Council hierarchy was unconvinced and given the continued lack of funding, no action was taken although some projects were financed on an *ad hoc* basis.[60] By the end of the 1940s, budget cuts were actually forcing the Council to restrict its activities. These cuts intensified following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and the ensuing rearmament programme. As the Council was forced to shut down offices and cultural centres across the world, the chances of setting up a new programme were slim.[61]

This was particularly regrettable as the publication in 1951 of the report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Report) made this a propitious moment for the Council to set up offices in Canada. The Commission was headed by Vincent Massey, a longstanding supporter of the British Council and a keen advocate of Canada developing its own international cultural relations body. It was not hard to find a British bias in the report, which, in the words of Paul Rutherford, "planned a culture as British as possible" (Rutherford 198). In particular, the Arts Council and the British Council were presented as models for a future Canada Council. Chapter seventeen of the report, whose title "The Projection of Canada Abroad" itself betrays the British influence, devoted a large section to British policy and the authors regretted that "alone among the Commonwealth countries" Canada had no permanent representative of the British Council in residence.[62]

The prospect of a collateral council with whom the British Council could work in partnership seemed at last on the point of becoming a reality, in the shape of the Canada Council. The British Council clearly saw itself in the role of its special advisor, shaping the organisation from the moment of its conception. There was even talk of offering to second a British Council officer to assist the Canadian authorities. This was rejected on the grounds that the Canada Council would be part of the

Canadian apparatus for external affairs and it would therefore be improper for a UK officer to be too closely associated with it. It seemed preferable to offer assistance to Canada through a resident British Council representative and through receiving a Canadian officer in London.[63]

The Massey Report also played a key role in changing the attitude of the UK High Commissioner and the Commonwealth Relations Office. Even the director of the Information Office in Ottawa was by now recommending that the Council should expand its activities in Canada.[64] By the early 1950s there was therefore a consensus that the Council should have a representative in Ottawa and, according to British sources at least, the Canadian government was also more receptive to the idea.[65] The Treasury remained the final obstacle. Clutterbuck's successor, Sir Archibald Nye, expressed his frustration in 1953:

> I do not accept the view that we should wait until a Canada Council is set up. Nor do I accept the financial argument. Our task is to present the British way of life in as many fields as possible. Canada by now is the leading 'middle' power and to us is of vital importance. We should no longer say that money does not permit of the British Council functioning here, since to do so is to ignore our own interests and to infer that other Commonwealth and foreign countries in which we continue to maintain such representatives are more important to us than Canada.[66]

Financial issues were in many ways the crux of the matter: although supposedly a non-political organisation, the British Council could only obtain funding from the government for work in countries which were considered sufficiently important. The British Council's attempts to develop activities in Commonwealth countries had been dogged by the fact that the Dominions Office had happily allowed the Foreign Office to place these countries in its lowest priority category after the war (Eastment 264). The Council's expansion was at times somewhat haphazard: on the eve of Gillan's departure to Australia in 1945, doubts were raised about the wisdom of proceeding in Australia and New Zealand until Treasury approval had been obtained for

Canada, described as "a far more important member of the Commonwealth."[67] A few years later, Redfern warned against expanding activity in Canada at the risk of prejudicing work in India and Pakistan, which he considered should take precedence.[68]

Despite the commitment of successive post-war British governments to using the Commonwealth to maintain Britain's international status, the British government was not prepared to finance international cultural relations as a way of reinforcing the ties which held this association of independent nations together. Moreover, a clear distinction was made between those former colonies which joined the Commonwealth after the war and the older Dominions. Although Council operations in India and Pakistan also suffered from a lack of funding, they nevertheless received higher priority than Canada and Australia. The British Council was more easily perceived as a means to maintain British influence during the period of decolonisation than as an instrument of Commonwealth unity.

The report of the Drogheda Committee on the Overseas Information Services (1953/1954) served to legitimate this position. It concluded that the Council should place the emphasis on educational rather than cultural work and shift its focus from the developed to the developing world. The report therefore recommended reinforcing the Council's work in the Indian sub-continent and the colonies and replacing Council centres with single cultural attachés in Australia and New Zealand. These were indeed closed down in 1954, though on the initiative of the Secretary of State for the Commonwealth (Donaldson 191-192). The underlying assumption was that not only could these countries afford to pay for any cultural services they wished to receive, but that a formal system of exchange was unnecessary with countries that shared a common heritage and language.

Faced with such opposition, the Council struggled to set out a cogent argument in favour of its Commonwealth programme. What exactly was it supposed to "project" in the Commonwealth? The idea of developing an imperial mission clearly exerted a certain influence over leading members of the Council but there was no concerted effort to redefine it this way. World War Two may have reinforced the feeling of belonging to a British family of nations yet it also reaffirmed the separate

identity of each Commonwealth nation (Buckner, 199-201). By the end of the war, Empire propaganda had become unpalatable in the Commonwealth.

Yet the Council also doubted whether it could apply the model it had developed for foreign countries. Its English language teaching programmes were inappropriate, or were too politically sensitive, in multilingual countries like Canada and South Africa. Portraying the British way of life was also problematic: a significant proportion of the populations of the Commonwealth still considered themselves more British than the British, and certainly in no need of being taught their own culture by an organisation based in London. The Council was well aware of the danger that its offer to bring British culture to the countries of the Commonwealth could easily appear condescending, implying that they were uncultured. [69] And some Council members did indeed see countries like Australia as "culturally backward."[70]

British Council documents from throughout this period recorded the Dominions' desire to recognize and nurture their separate cultural identities.[71] The Council believed it could play an accompanying role in this process, ensuring that the cultures of the British world remained anchored in a British heritage. By encouraging the development of cultural institutions along British lines, it could also hope to set a pattern which would influence future cultural policy. It imagined the emergence of a common system which would facilitate cultural exchange among the associated countries. Furthermore, for many of the different players involved, fostering the British connection was also a way of countering the growing cultural influence of the United States. This argument was consistently used by the Council to support its request for funding for action in the Dominions and by the mid-fifties had become central to the Commonwealth Relations Office's position too.[72] The same argument was also expressed by those from the Dominions themselves. The point was repeatedly made by Australians during and after the war and it featured heavily in the Massey Report of 1951.[73]

As the decline of the UK's military and economic power became increasingly obvious, cultural or "soft" power could appear as an alternative way to maintain

international prestige. The British Council's first representative to Australia summed it up thus:

> It is widely realised by thinking people here that the contribution of Britain to 20th century civilisation will perforce be mainly in the realms of intelligence and culture, rather than those of economic and military power. In the minds of Australians, Britain is beginning to stand for quality of achievement rather than magnitude.[74]

Although United States popular culture was clearly dominant, the United Kingdom hoped to hold its own in the field of high culture. Paradoxically, Britain's weakness may have made it easier for the Council to gain access to the Dominions, as they moved from a position of cultural dependence to cultural partnership (Finlay 168).

The story of the British Council's attempts to work with the Dominions over this period seems largely to have been one of false starts. What, if any, impact was the Council able to make in the countries studied? Certainly Britain managed to retain a certain cultural influence in the countries of the British world throughout the 1940s and into the early 1950s. The Council-sponsored tours of Australia by the Boyd Neel Orchestra and the Old Vic in 1947 and 1948 were both resounding successes, and led indirectly to the Council arranging for Tyrone Guthrie to visit Australia to advise the government on the establishment of a National Theatre (White 83). Canada consistently imported British personalities such as John Grierson and Tyrone Guthrie to run its cultural organisations and in light of this fact we can wonder whether Redfern's policy of fostering direct contacts between British "experts" and their Canadian counterparts was not the best course to follow. Redfern took pains to highlight all the different projects he had initiated in Canada, even going so far as to take credit for the Massey Commission which, he claimed, was "set up mainly as a result of my advice to the Secretary of State for External Affairs after my visit to Canada on behalf of the British Council in 1948."[75] Although the Council never

succeeded in establishing the sister councils it hoped for, the contacts it maintained with influential people such as Massey may well have favoured later developments. However, this British influence began to die away during the 1950s. By the time a Council representative finally arrived in Canada in 1959, the "centre of the highbrow world" had arguably shifted from London to New York, though the impact of this shift was not felt as quickly in Australia and New Zealand (Rutherford 203; Smith 208).[76] This was undeniably as much to do with the dynamism of American as opposed to British culture in this period as with the failings of the British government's international cultural policy. Nevertheless there is no doubt that Canada did indeed represent a missed opportunity for the Council. Although the Council initially met with great success in Australia and New Zealand, the closure of its centres so soon after their inauguration must have been damaging to intra-Commonwealth cultural relations and to the UK's prestige.

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Records of the British Council, National Archives, London:

BW 2 British Council: Registered Files, GB Series

BW 12 British Council: Registered Files, Australia

BW 20 British Council: Registered Files, Canada

BW 69 British Council: Executive Committee and Finance and Agenda Committee: Minutes and Papers

BW 82 British Council: Secretariat: Miscellanea

BW 87 British Council: Registered Files, New Zealand

Records of the Dominions Office, the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, National Archives, London:

DO 35 Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office: Original Correspondence

NOTES

[1] Tallents, quoted by Taylor, 112. *The Projection of England* which will be re-edited in Scott Anthony's *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011.

[2] The Canadian Citizenship Act of 1946 was followed by the British Nationality Act of 1948, the Australian Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948, the British Nationality and New Zealand Citizenship Act 1948 and the South African Citizenship Act 1949. Consequently, the inhabitants of the Commonwealth became citizens of their respective countries while remaining British subjects.

[3] "A Note on Imperial Cultural Relations," British Council, 26 June 1939. BW 2/88.

[4] Inskip to Lloyd, 17 July 1939; Memorandum on British Council Work in the Dominions by Johnstone, 26 July 1939. BW 2/88

[5] Record of meeting between Lloyd and Massey by Johnstone, 20 August 1939. BW 2/88.

[6] Meeting with Stanley Bruce, Australian High Commissioner in London, 15 August 1939. BW 12/2.

[7] The 1940 Royal Charter is reproduced in White 119. There is no mention of the Commonwealth in the modified Charter of 1993, which can be consulted on the British Council's website <http://www.britishcouncil.org/>.

[8] Cranborne to Robertson, 21 October 1941. BW 2/315

[9] Robertson to Bruce, Jordan, Massey, Waterson, 31 October 1941. BW 2/315.

[10] Report by Gillan, December 1941. BW 2/315.

[11] J. A. Gillan, "Note on the history and activities of the BC with special reference to the possibility of co-operation with Australia," c. 1943. BW 12/1.

[12] See for example Marjory Harper, "'Personal contact is worth a ton of text-books': educational tours of the empire, 1926-39," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32:3 (2004): 48-76; Simon Potter, *News and the British World. The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; Andrew Rodger, "Some factors contributing to the formation of the National Film Board of Canada," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 9:3 (1989): 259-268.

[13] Sir William Clark to the Dominions Office, 9 August 1945. DO 35/1212

[14] Vincent Massey had opened the exhibition *A Century of Canadian Art* (14 October 1938) by commending exchange between "our two British countries": see Finlay 173, 192.

[15] The British backed Imperial Relations Trust played a notable role in the creation of the National Film Board. The Carnegie Corporation's Canadian Committee, which decided which programmes would receive support, included Vincent Massey among its members.

[16] See also the papers of the ASSA Conference *Philanthropy and Public Culture: The Influence and Legacies of the Carnegie Corporation of New York in Australia*, University of Melbourne, 24-25 February 2010. Web. 2 August 2011.
<http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/research/eesi_research_program/assa_conference/timetable_papers.html >

[17] Meeting with Bruce, 15 August 1939. BW 12/2.

[18] Church to British Council, 30 December 1940. BW2/88

[19] Ifor Evans' report on his meeting with Massey, 1 March 1941. BW 2/88

[20] Brian Jones to A. J. S. White, British Council, 15 June 1944, BW 12/1.

[21] Sir Malcolm Robertson M.P. in debate on colonial development, Parliamentary Debates, 26 November 1942. Web. 24 April 2011.
<http://www.hansardarchive.parliament.uk/Official_Report,_House_of_Commons_1909_t

o_1981>. Casey had expressed the same idea in a personal letter to Robertson not long before. Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting, 10 November 1942. BW 69/8

[22] The Council was accused of having an "imperialistic attitude" in that they tried "to occupy every position without consulting the proper authority." Memorandum by Pugh, Dominions Office, May 1943. DO 35/1200

[23] This meeting was held during the Prime Ministers' Conference of May 1944. Ministry of Information memorandum on Empire Publicity, January 1945. DO 35/1211

[24] The driving force behind the Council's creation, Foreign Office official Rex Leeper, publicly used the term "propaganda" in relation to the Council. See for example R. Leeper, "Interpreting Civilisation," *The British Council, Speeches delivered on the occasion of the inaugural meeting*, London: British Council, 2 July 1935. Newspapers such as *The Times*, 20 March 1935, and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1939, also presented the Council as a propaganda agency.

[25] "Note on Imperial Cultural relations," British Council 26 June 1939. BW 2/88

[26] Handwritten note added to Ifor Evans' report on his meeting with Massey, 1 March 1941. Also records of meetings with Massey 20 August 1939 and Ney 12 November 1939. BW 2/88

[27] J. Angus Gillan "Note on the history and activities of the British Council with special reference to the possibility of co-operation with Australia," c. 1943. BW 12/1

[28] "Note on possible work by the British Council within the Empire," 6 January 1940. BW 2/88

[29] Paper D on the Dominions and Canada. Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee 9 March 1943. BW 69/8

[30] Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee 13 October 1942. BW 69/8.

[31] Gillan, "Note on the history and activities of the British Council," c. 1943. BW 12/1. According to Diane Eastment, the donor was Sir Eugen Millington-Drake, former British ambassador to Uruguay and Chief Representative of the British Council in Latin America, (1941-1946). Eastment, 168.

[32] Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee 10 November 1942. BW 69/8.

[33] Gillan, minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee 10 November 1942. BW 69/8.

[34] The British Council had also employed a Canadian officer recruited by the Canadian Army in order to assist it in its work with Canadian Forces stationed in the UK. Gillan "Note on the history and activities of the British Council," c. 1943. BW 12/1.

[35] Gillan "Note on the history and activities of the British Council," c. 1943. BW 12/1.

[36] Gillan to R. G. C. McNab, Liaison Division Cairo, 22 March 1944. BW 12/1.

[37] Memorandum by Gillan relating to the impending tour of Australia and New Zealand by a British Council representative, January 1945. BW 12/1.

[38] Gillan considered that the principal difficulty with Australia was "to get a lead": the Council needed "some ostensible invitation and though some people in Australia House are sympathetic I cannot get an official interest expressed." Gillan to O'Brien, British Council Press Division, April 1944. BW 12/1

[39] Personal letter from Dawson, Australian News and Information Bureau, Australia House to Towsey, British Council, 21 July 1944. BW 12/1

[40] Dominions Office meeting, 20 October 1944. DO 35/1211

[41] Unsigned document, August 1945. DO 35/1212

[42] Richard Seymour "Developments in the UK during the Second World War, leading to the practice of collective cultural co-operation," 1965. BW 82/19.

[43] Summary of meeting between Gillan and Bruce, 7 September 1944. BW 12/1.

[44] Gillan to Secretary-General and Chairman, 29 September 1944 relating a meeting with Sir Ronald Cross, the UK High Commissioner in Australia. BW 12/1.

[45] Memorandum by Gillan, 7 September 1944. BW 12/1. Gaining access to the latter country was also facilitated by the support of the UK High Commissioner, Sir Harry Batterbee. Memorandum by Gillan, 1 November 1944. BW 12/1.
[46] Clipping in Council archives, 31 May 1947. BW 12/1.
[47] Memorandum by G. H. A Swan forwarded to British Council by the New Zealand Representative, John Bostock. 23 May 1950. BW 87/6.
[48] Clutterbuck to Redfern 23 June. BW 20/2.
[49] Memorandum by Redfern, 29 May 1947. BW 20/2.
[50] Redfern to Gillan, 4 July 1947. BW 20/2.
[51] Redfern to Gillan 29 May 1947. In a personal letter to Redfern, Massey reiterated his support and confirmed the absence of any official objection. Extract included in a memorandum by Redfern 18 August 1947. BW 20/2.
[52] Handwritten notes added to Redfern's memorandum on 21 August 1947, when the suspension of the convertibility of sterling was officially announced, indicate that the Council had decided to defer activity in Canada due to "financial and currency difficulties." BW 20/2.
[53] Telegram from the UK High Commissioner in Canada, communicated to the Council by Hope of the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), 7 October 1947. BW 20/2.
[54] Memorandum by Redfern and letter from Redfern to Hope, 9 October 1947. BW 20/2.
[55] Personal letter from Redfern to C. A. Bowman, 1 January 1948. BW 20/2. Quotes from an un-named newspaper in his post-visit report suggest that he may have had some success.
[56] Redfern to Norman Robertson, Canadian High Commissioner in London, 21 July 1948. Reply from Mr. Pearson under-secretary of state for external affairs, communicated via Canada House, 31 August 1948. BW 20/2.
[57] Redfern to Clutterbuck, 28 September 1948. BW 20/2.
[58] McGregor, Board of Trade to Shreeve, British Council, 10 May 1950. Exchange between British Council officers May-August 1950. BW 20/8.
[59] Shreeve's reply to McGregor, Board of Trade, 24 August 1950: "we shall never persuade the Treasury by imaginative ideas and prophetic insight. We shall have to produce the sort of 'evidence' that would satisfy a suburban bank manager of Yorkshire origin to authorise an overdraft without reference to his headquarters." BW 20/8
[60] As a comparison, the estimated budget for Australia in 1949/50 was £24 000. Memorandum "Future work of the Council in Canada," 21 April 1949. BW 20/8.
[61] The CRO budget in fact resisted better than those of the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, and did not start to fall until 1951, but this was mainly due to funding for India and Pakistan: see White 73-74.
[62] The report was not entirely accurate in that the Council did not send its first Representative to South Africa until 1958. The report included five paragraphs on British policy, two on France and the US respectively, and two on "other countries". *Massey Report*, 253-286.
[63] Memorandum on the establishment of a British Council representative in Ottawa, 11 February 1952. BW 20/2.
[64] Director of the UK Information Office in Ottawa, to Redfern, June 1951. BW 20/9.
[65] Series of reports, 1951-1953, BW 20/9. The CRO informed the Treasury that the Canadian government was "most anxious that we should proceed with British Council representation." 20 February 1952. BW 20/2.
[66] Office of the High Commissioner for the UK despatch no. 123 to Rt. Hon. Viscount Swindon Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 13 July 1953. BW 20/9.
[67] Note added to Gillan's memorandum concerning his visit to Australia and New Zealand, January 1945. BW 12/1.

[68] Redfern to Shreeve, Assistant Director-General of the British Council, 23 June 1951. BW 20/2.
[69] The Council's Representative in Australia wrote in his first report, (February 1947): "First there is the outlook of the ordinary self-reliant Australian who would resent it if he thought the Council was here to improve him. Secondly, some Australians think that what Australia wants is not more British culture but some culture of her own, and consider that Australia is more British than Britain anyhow." BW 12/4.
[70] The Australian Brian Jones considered that many of his countrymen desired increased "cultural traffic from England" as they were "conscious of their country's shortcomings and backwardness." Jones to A. J. S. White, British Council, 15 June 1944. Gillan to Secretary-General and Chairman summarising his discussion with Bruce, 7 September 1944: "Australia was just beginning to realise that she was a nation and also that she was very isolated and had no sort of cultural background. " BW 12/1.
[71] Redfern to CRO, 20 November 1947. BW 20/2.
[72] Nye to Swindon, despatch no. 123, 13 July 1953. BW 20/9.
[73] Johnstone's report of the British Council's meeting with Bruce, 15 August 1939. BW 2/88 Jones to White, 15 June 1944. BW 12/1.
[74] Report by Charles Wilmot on Boyd Neel Orchestra tour, May 1947. BW 12/4. Similarly, Redfern chose to remind the Canadian High Commissioner of Britain's great "cultural wealth" which should be set against her shortage of "material resources." Redfern to Robertson, 21 July 1948. BW 20/2.
[75] Redfern to Shreeve, Assistant Director-General of the British Council, 23 June 1951. BW 20/2.