

Following is the text of a speech to be delivered
to the Oxford Conservative Association at 20.15 (8.15 p.m)
this evening (Friday, March 5, 1943) by
Colonel Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the
Colonies. Not for publication, or broadcast
before delivery, and to be checked against delivery.

I thought that I ought to begin by apologising for the fact that I came here tonight to talk to you about the future of the Colonial Empire, when I had only been Colonial Secretary for three short months; but I then reminded myself that those three months, short as they seem to be, represented twenty-five per cent of the average life of a Colonial Secretary in the last seventeen years. With that sombre thought I realised that I was far from being a young Colonial Secretary: I was in fact already approaching middle age.

The Office to which I have come must at all times have been of absorbing interest, but it can never have been more absorbing than now, when the whole question of the British Colonial Empire is exciting more interest than ever before, both at home and abroad. This added interest is particularly noticeable abroad and especially in the United States. There are some in that great country who obviously emphatically believe in the old adage "Spare the rod and spoil the Ally". They feel - no doubt with justice - that a continuous pointing out of our faults and frailties and an underlining of our sins of omission and commission is the one thing needed to stimulate and encourage us to greater efforts in the common cause. It is true that of the great volume of friendly criticism and disinterested advice which comes to us from across the water, much is directed to our Colonial Empire - or rather to the American conception of our Colonial Empire. I am, however, going to confess that I am guilty of a heresy: I am going to confess that I am more interested in what Britain thinks of the British Empire than in what the United States of America think of it; and it is for this reason that if I know the people here are interested in our Colonies, are instructed about our Colonies, and, being both interested and instructed, are satisfied with our Colonies, then indeed I should feel content. Because people here yield to no other people in a sense of humanity, a desire for progress and in an attachment to liberty.

One of the last acts of my predecessor before he left the Colonial Office was to make a speech in the House of Lords in which at some length he reviewed our Colonial past. It was an excellent speech; it has been reprinted as a pamphlet and as such should be read by all. It puts with great sincerity and with great force the justification for our Colonial policy in the past. That has now been done, and done well. But I must confess that my interest lies more in the Colonial future than in the Colonial past, and that my chief interest in the past is that it provides us with a guide to the future. But to my mind, the three questions which we have got to put to ourselves and to answer are: "What sort of a Colonial Empire is it?", "What sort of a Colonial Empire do we want it to be?", and "What have we got to do about it?". Let me try in turn to answer all those three questions.

First of all, what sort of an Empire is it? The first thing that strikes anyone in a study of our Colonial Empire is its infinite variety. Over fifty territories of every size, of every climate, of every race, of every stage of economic and social development. Neither in politics, in economics, nor in social welfare is it possible to find any common yardstick, any one measure, that is applicable to all. In each one of them the problems are quite different, and so in each one of them will have to be the solutions.

I often hear people talk about a Colonial Charter. If by this you mean a statement of the general principles which animate us in the administration of our Colonial territories, then it is possible to give one. It has in fact been stated; I will try and re-state it tonight. But if you mean by a Colonial Charter some common plan of execution, or some common timetable of achievement, then the infinite variety of the Colonial territories makes anything of the kind quite impossible.

Now what sort of job have we made in these fifty Colonial territories which in the past we have been administering? My own view is this: that as far as the things are concerned which we set out to do, we have done them well. What were they? First of all there was the establishment of the rule of law, the attempt to establish safety for life and property in areas many of which had never known security for either; and this establishment of law and order is neither so easy nor so inevitable as it seems after it has been established and has become to be regarded as permanent. Not even the fiercest critic of our Colonial administration can deny that we have succeeded to the full in the establishment of the rule of law.

The second thing we set out to do was to give an example of impartial justice and incorruptible administration. Here again I think no one will deny that we have succeeded in our object, and we have set up standards which, if only they can be maintained in changing conditions and progress towards self-government, will be of lasting benefit to the Colonies.

Thirdly, we set ourselves the task of preventing exploitation, and here one meets many misconceptions of the financial relationship between the Colonies and ourselves. Well, we exact no contribution from the Colonies to the Central Exchequer: our tariff advantages are everywhere slight, and in great areas non-existent: mining and production are regulated so as to provide not only a fair reward for the enterpriser, who has taken the risk but also a substantial benefit to the Colony as a whole. Nor have we placed obstacles in the way of other nations who wish access to our Colonial products.

I feel that we can put up an excellent defence against the accusation that we have failed to prevent the exploitation of our Colonial territories.

And lastly, we have set out to devote the income of the Colony to the benefit of the Colony. Of course, the results have varied greatly, for the income has varied greatly, but all over the Colonial Empire you will find examples of good communications, good health services, valuable agricultural research, improving higher education, valuable assets built up out of the Colonial revenues.

Now those are the things that in the last century and in the beginning years of this century and in the beginning years of this century we set out to do in our Colonial territories. Within those limits we have done them well, and within those limits we have no need to be ashamed of the past. If we were still satisfied with those limits we could equally afford to be complacent about the present. But are we still satisfied? Can we still be satisfied? Many years ago we declared that it was our intention to act as trustees for our Colonial Empire, and we have fully lived up to that promise. But in the very conception of trusteeship there are limitations with which I do
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not believe we can in future be content. I am myself trustee for a number of people. I set out to do for them on a small scale what we set out on a large scale to do for the Colonial Empire. I try and safeguard their estate from exploitation, to preserve it intact, to improve it as far as possible, and to see that the income of the estate is enjoyed by the recipient of the trust. But as trustee I feel no obligation to go further than that. I feel no call to make up out of my pocket any deficiency in the income of the beneficiary, to risk my money to improve the beneficiary's estate. Can we be satisfied in future with such a negative conception of trusteeship?

The second question that I said we had to ask ourselves was "What sort of Empire do we want to see?", and I will, if I may, divide the answer into three parts, political, economic and social.

With regard to the political future, successive British statesmen have announced that our ultimate aim in the Colonial Empire is to see self-government established in the various territories. We have been sincere in those declarations in the past; we are equally sincere when we repeat them to-day. This country, with a longer history of real self-government perhaps than any other, has the best reason to know what benefits flow to the development of the individual character and of the individual life from the rights of self-government, benefits which we believe far outweigh any loss of cold efficiency which self-government may bring. But sincere as we are in our aims for the future, it is no good blinding ourselves to the realities of the present.

Self-government is not just a gift. It is also a responsibility, and we have to recognise, as I said before, that in our fifty territories to-day we find all differing stages of political development. Some territories which have for years been practising a greater or lesser extent of self-government, have reached already an advanced stage of political education, and nothing but short and perhaps quick stages lie between them and real self-government. But others are in different stages. They have behind them fewer years of settled, orderly life, less opportunities for political training and less realisation of political responsibilities. In their cases the stages by which we advance must necessarily be slow. Nothing could be easier for a politician anxious for a reputation for progressive outlook than to produce for every territory a glittering constitution which he knew could not in fact be worked. But nothing, too, could be more disastrous both for the material prosperity and the political advance of the territories concerned.

We have, I think, in the last few days given a real earnest of our sincere desire for self-government, whenever and wherever practicable. The recent proposals which were made to Jamaica for a reform of their constitution means a great advance on the road to responsibility for the administration of their own affairs.

Meanwhile, while these various territories are progressing by varying methods and at varying stages towards this ultimate goal, what is the political set-up of the British Colonial Empire to be? I am convinced that the first
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and fundamental principle is that the administration of the British Colonies must continue to be the sole responsibility of Great Britain. I myself give no support to a theory, which I think now gains few adherents, that it would be for the benefit of a particular Colony or for the benefit of the world as a whole that the Colony should be administered by some international body. I can think of nothing which is more likely in practice to break down and less likely to lead to the steady development of the territory concerned. Administration, the right to administer - in other words - sovereignty - is not merely a right to power; it also carries with it many responsibilities. Responsibilities in the future in the Colonial Empire will not be confined to the making of laws or the keeping of order. They will entail, as I have tried to show before and as I will deal with more fully later, financial and economic aid on a large scale.

But if we alone are prepared to take that responsibility, are prepared to make those financial sacrifices which flow from our responsibility, then we alone are in a position to exercise the control and to have the power.

But quite apart from these practical considerations, I believe that any suggestion for an international administration ignores the real feelings of the people in the territories concerned. Years of historic connection, years of steady and in some places spectacular progress have built up between the British and the local inhabitants a real bond of sympathy and of affection. It is not affected by the natural desire for even further advance, for quicker progress, for more independence and responsibility, and I believe that the people themselves would deeply resent a substitution of a new polyglot and perhaps an ephemeral administration for the British connection which they know and respect. But because I believe, and believe strongly, that the administration must remain British and the sovereignty national, it does not mean that I exclude the possibility of close international co-operation. Indeed, under present circumstances I regard such co-operation not only as desirable but essential. Developments of modern transport and modern communication have brought close together vast areas which before were widely separated. Many of their problems today are common problems and can only be solved in co-operation. Problems of transport, of economics, of health etc., far transcend the boundaries of a particular political unit, and I therefore should welcome the establishment of machinery which enabled such problems to be discussed and to be solved by common efforts. But I should want this machinery to be real, not to be a nice theory or a pretty picture, but something which grappled with realities and really got down to the facts of the problem.

Now let me turn to the economic side. What we want to see in the Colonial territories is a maximum economic development, first of all in the interests of the Colonies themselves and then of the world as a whole. We have never in the past, we shall not in the future, desire to see this economic development from purely selfish motives or on purely selfish lines. The direct benefits to our own economy may be small in the future as they have been small in the past. But the indirect benefits can come incomparably great. If we can

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make sixty million people happy, prosperous, friendly and grateful, people who transact their business in the same language as us, who have experience of our commercial methods and a predilection for our commercial products, the indirect assets to the economy of this country may well be enormous.

But how are we going to get that maximum economic development? In the first place, we must admit that the extent to which we can reach the maximum depends upon the general world set-up. The Colonies as a whole are territories of primary producers and such territories can never hope to reach a maximum prosperity except in an expansionist world where products move freely across the seas, where demand is increased rather than supply restricted, and where the use of a product depends more upon its essential utility than upon the particular country of its origin. It must be the hope of anyone responsible for the British Colonial Empire that that is the sort of economic world set-up that the United Nations are going to be able to provide after the war.

But within the general framework of world economy there is much that we ourselves can do towards development of our own Colonies. They are now, and probably must always remain, in default of quite unexpected discoveries, preponderantly agricultural in character. But there are many problems of soil fertility and soil erosion, of animal disease, of better agricultural methods, of better marketing or of processing of agricultural products and of new uses for old production, which can be solved and which will need time, skill and above all money for their solution. But, although these territories, as I said, will remain predominantly agricultural, we must not exclude the possibility, indeed the necessity, of secondary industries to absorb some, at least, of the labour as it becomes more highly skilled. And I think this country approaches the development of secondary industries in the Colonies in no selfish spirit. They are quite content to see a secondary industry established where the local market can materially support it or where it is a necessary adjunct to the surrounding agriculture. What we don't want to see, because we believe it to be neither in the interest of this country nor in the interest of the territory itself, is a wholly unnatural and uneconomic secondary industry fostered behind abnormal barriers.

Now, lastly, with regard to social development our object is to see the various peoples of the various territories develop themselves - develop along the lines of their own national aptitude, of their own culture and of their own tradition. In other words we want to see good Africans, good West Indians, good Malaysians, and not imitation Englishmen.

There is obviously an immense amount to do in the development of the various social services in the Colonies. We have just published a report by Sir Frank Stockdale, the Commissioner under the Welfare and Development Act for the West Indies. It is not only the most detailed survey of the problems, but the most detailed survey of the possible solutions which has ever been done of any part of the British Colonial Empire. But it does show what a great deal remains to be done in the West Indies, and we can assume when we come to make equally detailed

surveys of the other parts of the Empire that there will be just as much, if not more, to be done there. And it is clear that we shall never have the development of social services, which is vitally necessary, were we to adhere rigidly to the old rule that each Colony must pay its own way.

We got in the past into a vicious circle. Economic developments necessitated the development of social services because, if you were to develop economically, you wanted the better health, the better education, the greater skill, the greater sense of responsibility which only the development of the social services could give. But on the other hand, social services could not be developed without an economic development which would bring increased revenue and increased ability therefore to bear the cost of the social services. That vicious circle was broken once and for all in 1940 by the passage of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act - an Act which provides £5 million a year for ten years for expenditure on welfare and development together with an additional sum for expenditure on research.

It is quite true that under the war conditions, difficulties of importing materials, difficulties of labour engaged on war work, it has not yet been possible to spend even the sum allowed for in that Act. But because we have not been able to do it under the quite abnormal conditions which war has produced in the Colonial Empire, it does not mean that after the war we shall find that this sum is too much. On the contrary, we are likely to find that it is too little. I well foresee that after the war I shall have to ask for more, and much will depend upon the answer given to that question. But if we intend, as intend we must, that the Colonial Empire shall be something of which we can be really proud, this country has got to spend large sums of money for some years. But we have always got to bear this in mind that we don't want to set up in any Colony a top-heavy structure of social services which, whatever the future economic development of the Colony may be, the Colony itself will never be able to carry. For to contemplate not merely a period of financial assistance from this country which will enable the Colony subsequently to bear its own burdens but a continual receipt of large subsidies from the British taxpayer, is to make a mockery of the ideal of self-government. How can any Colony hope for self-government if it has for ever to rely for its accustomed standard of social services on large contributions from this country?

The third and last question which I said we had to ask ourselves was "What are we going to do about it?" In the first place it is, I am sure, essential to develop in this country both the knowledge of and the interest in the Colonial Empire. And it is not too easy to do. During the war we have got to rely upon the ordinary methods of publicity - the speech, the written word, the wireless, the film. After the war I look forward to a time when, with improved communications which air transport will give us, it will be possible for large numbers of people in this country, particularly those responsible for forming opinion - teachers, social workers etc., to visit the Colonies for themselves to see what things really are and to come back with a knowledge which they can spread around. For knowledge and interest are absolutely essential.

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We are entering now into a dynamic period in Colonial development. It is not going to be a time where things will gradually and slowly evolve. It is a time when we shall be faced with many difficult situations and have many difficult decisions to make, to go fast here where it appears to be dangerous, to go slow there even if it appears to be overcautious. The decisions will depend upon our democracy and democracy can only act rightly if it knows and appreciates the facts.

And the second essential is this - that we should be ready now for the developments which are bound to take place after the war. It is quite true that during the war, war-time difficulties may prevent a great deal being done. But there is no reason why we should not get everything ready. I am not one who disbelieves in the importance of planning. I spent a year in the Joint Planning Staff and I know what looking ahead means in military affairs. I cannot think that it is any less important in civil matters. We have got to think things out in advance and to be ready for them when they come. Otherwise we will have nothing but a series of makeshifts, of improvisations and of half measures which can only result in chaos.

And that, I confess, is my aim and my ambition that despite all the difficulties, we should get everything ready now so that we may implement them quickly in the happier days of peace. It is the years immediately after the war which will be the testing time of our Colonial Empire. If we meet those years right we shall have sixty million people prosperous, friendly and grateful, bound by unbreakable ties of common interest and common respect to the British Commonwealth. If we meet them wrong, then we shall lose an Empire which we shall not have had the imagination, the knowledge or the foresight to hold.