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The British Council in India, 1945-1955: Preserving “old relationships under new forms.”

The United Kingdom that emerged from World War Two was clearly no longer the Great Power it once had been, though the extent of its permanent loss of power was not so apparent. The Labour government elected in 1945/1950, and the Conservative one which succeeded it, were determined to maintain a world role for the UK with the Empire and Commonwealth as its cornerstone. By 1945, Indian Independence was inevitable, the only question that remained was what form it would take. It was hoped that a smooth transition would encourage India’s new leaders to maintain a strong connection with Britain, ideally as a member of the Commonwealth. Cultural and educational diplomacy were seen as ways of maintaining that connection despite the loss of direct political control.

It was in this context that the British government finally agreed to sanction, and fund, the establishment of the British Council in India. It is with this process, the obstacles it encountered and the objectives pursued by the Council in newly independent India that this chapter is concerned. The chronological focus is on the first decade of peace after the end of World War Two as the British government was not prepared to negotiate independence until hostilities had ended and, in effect, wartime conditions in India were not favourable to the Council. But the British Council’s wartime role and contacts with India form the background to this story and the starting point of this chapter.

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The British Council held the potential to foster cultural ties to Britain during the process of decolonization, a fact that was already recognised by the Colonial Office.¹ India would provide a test case. More generally, British foreign policy in the 1950s sought to maintain what John Darwin has called an empire “of influence and identity” rather than one characterised by commercial and military power.² This shift appeared to leave more scope for a body such as the Council. The publication of the Drogheda Report in December 1954 led to a major rethink of British cultural diplomacy. 1955 therefore marked a turning point in the development of the British Council, while in subsequent years

1 - A. J. S. White, *The British Council: the First Twenty-five Years, 1934–1959*, (London: British Council, 1965), p. 71.

2 - John Darwin, *The Empire Project. The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 579.

the aftershocks of Suez and the second wave of decolonization were, of course, to have far-reaching effects on British foreign policy.

THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND INDIA 1939-1945

The British Council was founded by Foreign Office official Rex Leeper in 1934, with its stated aim being “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.”³ It was in fact the rise of aggressive Nazi and Fascist propaganda which had finally convinced the British government to give limited support to a cultural propaganda organization. Priority in its earliest years was therefore given to foreign countries in Europe, the Middle East and South America. Nevertheless, many of those involved in the Council’s expansion were keen to see the organization pursue an imperial mission. The use of the plural “British peoples” in its original mission statement reflected this desire to encompass a wider British community, while “strengthening the common cultural tradition of the British Commonwealth” was included among its initial goals. Furthermore, it was under the chairmanship of Lord Lloyd, appointed in 1937, that the Council’s growth began in earnest. A former governor of Bombay and High Commissioner to Egypt, Lloyd was a diehard imperialist who oversaw the extension of Council activities to colonial territories such as Cyprus and Malta, where British interests were perceived as being particularly endangered. His appointment as Secretary of State to the Colonies in May 1940 served to bolster the Council’s efforts to develop an imperial programme. 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. The Council’s attempts to work in and with the Dominions were less successful largely due to the combined opposition of the Dominions Office and the Ministry of Information.

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Given the imperial dimension to the Council’s work, it was inevitable that it should seek to become active in India. It had begun supplying the Government of India’s Information Officer with material such as press articles and films before World War Two but the India Office showed only limited interest in extending Council activities there. Tentative discussions were brought to a halt in January 1942, when Gillan was reportedly

3 - White, 7. For more on the early years of the British Council, see Philip Taylor, *The Projection of Britain. British overseas publicity and propaganda 1919-1939*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). An official history was also commissioned to celebrate the Council’s fiftieth anniversary: Frances Donaldson, *The British Council. The First Fifty Years*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).

"warned off" India.⁴ The subsequent failure of the Cripps mission, the steady advance of Japanese forces in South-East Asia and Congress' Quit India campaign could only have reinforced the India Office's caution. None of this served to curb the imperial ardour of Lord Lloyd's successor, Sir Malcolm Robertson, who informed the House of Commons in 1942 that his post-war ambition was to turn the Council into a "British Empire Council" staffed by men from the Dominions, India and the Colonies.⁵

In practice, discussions between the British Council and the India Office's information service tended to focus on the more realistic objective of using Indo-British cultural relations to encourage nationalistic, educated Indians to maintain their connection with Britain and the Commonwealth.⁶ In the course of 1943, the India Office's attitude towards the Council began to shift, but doubts remained as to whether it would be welcomed by its potential audience. The Council was widely perceived as a propaganda organization and was particularly hampered in India by its association with Lord Lloyd.⁷ As Governor of Bombay, Lloyd had played a prominent role in the arrest of Gandhi in 1922 and he later led resistance to the 1935 India Bill in the House of Lords.⁸ Hence a report submitted to the Council in September 1944 went so far as to suggest that the Council start work under a new name such as the Indo-British Cultural Association.⁹ Subsequent correspondence between Robertson and the Secretary of State for India, Leo Amery, both of whom were Conservative MPs, focussed on developing exchanges between learned societies rather than through the British Council.¹⁰

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A Council officer was nonetheless dispatched to India in late 1944 to make discreet inquiries. His report confirmed the existence of a "real suspicion of imperial propaganda" and the permeation of politics into all spheres. But there were also reasons to believe that India would offer fertile ground for Council activity given that nationalist attacks on British colonial rule co-existed with a high regard for British culture, particularly the English language and British university education. The report also emphasised the

4 - Diana Eastment, *The Policies and Position of the British Council from the Outbreak of War to 1950*. Ph.D. thesis. Leeds: University of Leeds, 1982, p. 153-154.

5 - Sir Malcolm Robertson M.P. in debate on colonial development, Parliamentary Debates, 26 November 1942. Web. 1 July 2014. <hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/nov/26/colonial-development>

6 - India Office Information Officer A. H. Joyce to T. W. Morray, British Council, 16 October 1943, quoted by Eastment, 155.

7 - Memorandum by Sir John Sargent 1944, quoted by Eastment, 155.

8 - D. A. Low, "The Government of India and the First Non-Cooperation Movement – 1920-1922", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, issue 2, Feb. 1966, p. 241-259. V. L. Ramsden-Atherton, *Lord Lloyd: Cultural Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, 1937-1941*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 1988, p. 23.

9 - A. F. Bell British Council Middle Eastern Office to Gillan, 25 August 1944. TNA BW 38/1.

10 - October 1944, AMEL 2/1/38, Amery papers, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge.

importance of favouring reciprocal cultural relations as a way of winning Indian support.¹¹ At the end of the war these plans were shelved pending the general election and the reassessment of the Council's role in the post-war period. More importantly, it was no longer possible to make plans based on India's current situation; henceforth the Council's establishment in India would have to be negotiated with India's future rulers.

ESTABLISHING THE COUNCIL AT INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

The Labour government elected in 1945 took a year to guarantee the British Council's immediate future. In the meantime, the protracted negotiation of Indian independence had already begun. When Jawaharlal Nehru came to the unsuccessful London conference in December 1946, Gillan's assistant T. P. Tunnard-Moore was able to make contact with Nehru's secretary. The following month Gillan travelled to India, where the recently appointed High Commissioner, Sir Terence Shone, was able to obtain an interview for him with Nehru. Shone reported Nehru's attitude in the meeting with Gillan as "wary rather than enthusiastic".¹² Nevertheless, Gillan succeeded in convincing Nehru that the services offered by the Council would be to the advantage of the future Indian state. Having recently accompanied a group of British scientists to the Indian Science Congress in Delhi, Gillan was able to emphasize the role played by the Council in bringing out what was the largest delegation of any country. The message would not have been lost on Nehru, who had been personally involved in inviting and welcoming these foreign delegates, reflecting his preoccupation at that time with questions of scientific development and planning.¹³ With Nehru's blessing the Council could finally make plans for Council representation in an independent India, in whatever form it finally emerged.

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Shone, described as an "old Council friend" by Gillan thanks to his support in Egypt and Syria¹⁴, forcefully put the case for the Council's presence in India to the newly formed Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) in London:

What seems to require emphasis – from our point of view if not for the ears of the Interim Government – is that in India the Council, although starting up as a new organisation, will really be largely responsible for taking over and maintaining a connection which is long established and has wide ramifications. It surely behoves us to see that at the critical period of transition the very utmost is done to preserve old relationships under new forms.¹⁵

11 - Report by T. W. Morray "India and the British Council", 31 January 1945. TNABW 38/1.

12 - Despatch from Sir Terence Shone to Cabinet Secretary, 17 January 1947. TNABW 38/5.

13 - *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984), Ed. S Gopal, Volume One, p. 367, p. 371-377; Volume Two, p. 597-602.

14 - Sir Angus Gillan, British Council. Report on a Visit to India, January 1947, p. 6. TNA FO 924/718.

15 - Sir Terence Shone UK High Commissioner New Delhi to Patrick CRO, 8 March 1947.

Far from symbolizing a new chapter in Indo-British relations, the arrival of the Council was seen as a means to ensure continuity and the maintenance of existing links. Shone was understandably reticent about voicing this argument publicly, and yet Nehru too may have found political advantage in the Council's presence. Indeed, according to his biographer, in the course of 1947 Nehru would be swayed by the arguments of those such as Mountbatten and Krishna Menon who favoured Commonwealth membership in the interests of stability and "the continuance of 'the British connection' in a healthier context."¹⁶

The political argument advanced by Shone was accepted by the Foreign Office, which was preparing to take on responsibility for the Council in India if the latter left the Commonwealth. For the Foreign Office, the British legacy in India was above all a cultural one, and it therefore considered there was a "cast-iron case" for an extensive Council programme in India.¹⁷ For the first time the Council could rely on a firm consensus among the relevant government departments, which enabled it to convince the Chancellor of the Exchequer to release the necessary funds. These funds were almost immediately reduced, while the bloody partition of India meant that the Council had to envisage two separate operations in India and Pakistan. Nevertheless, by 1948 the Council had succeeded in recruiting Sir John Sargent, formerly education adviser to the Government of India, to lay the foundations of its new programme.

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One of the immediate challenges facing the Council was finding its first Representative. Nehru had expressed the hope that a person of "high academic standing" would be appointed, while the Indian delegation to UNESCO had put forward the name of Sir Hector Hetherington, Principal of the University of Glasgow, Chairman of the British Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and a leading member of the Bureau of Empire Universities. The Council's Chairman recognized that it would be hard to recruit such a candidate and floated E. M. Forster as an alternative.¹⁸ Ultimately the Council was either unable or unwilling to find a public figure to fill the position and opted instead for experienced Council officers. The Council's first Representative in India, W. R. L. Wickham, was transferred from Brazil and had won praise for keeping the Malta office open during World War Two. Most interestingly, the third Council Representative in India, C. A. F. Dundas, had served the Council in the Middle East throughout the war before taking up a diplomatic and possibly

TNA FO 924/718.

16 - Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru a Biography*, Volume 2 1947-1956, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 46.

17 - Handwritten comment by T. S. Tull, January 1948. TNA FO 924/718.

18 - ACD to Sargent, c. 3/47; Secretary of State to HE the Viceroy, 9/1/47. Mountbatten Papers, File 33, British Library.

secret service position.¹⁹ The British Council in India was thus entrusted to administrators and servants of the state rather than academics or intellectuals. This doubtless encouraged a greater harmony of outlook between Whitehall and staff on the ground as to the overall purpose of the Council in India.

Two factors were deemed vital to the programme's success. Firstly, it was essential to ensure an adequate and perennial budget from the outset. Gillan's conclusion that it would be better for the Council not to start work in India at all than to attempt to do so with insufficient funds was endorsed by both Wickham and by Sir Terence Shone.²⁰ The CRO warned the Treasury that, given the sheer size of the area to be covered, making "an impact on Indian opinion" would require a significant budget. It argued, further, that this required a long-term commitment, for Britain's prestige would be placed at risk were the Council forced to curtail its efforts.²¹ Secondly, the programme had to be launched swiftly to ensure the continuity of British influence. Perhaps surprisingly, reports from India all emphasized the considerable goodwill that existed towards Britain and the demand for Council services. Britain, it was argued, possessed a natural advantage over other countries as much of India's elite was still British-educated and familiar with British culture and practice. As such this elite represented the key to Britain's future political and economic influence; it was important that the Council should be capable of responding to demands made on it quickly in order to maintain this connection. Above all, numerous reports attested to the threat posed to British influence by the American presence in India.²²

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The warnings expressed by Gillan and the CRO proved prescient. The very beginnings of the Council in India coincided with a ten percent reduction in the Council's overall budget.²³ By the end of 1948 the Council had sent only five officers to India and Pakistan, where they were supported by six locally recruited staff.²⁴ This contrasted with the British Information

19 - Dundas had been sent to the Middle East in 1938 as the Council's very first Representative. According to Stephen Dorrill, from 1942 to 1951, Dundas was attached to an MI6 front office in Beirut before serving as consul in Damascus. Stephen Dorrill, *MI6. Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence Service* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), p. 536-537.

20 - Sir Angus Gillan, British Council, Report on a Visit to India, January 1947, p. 5; W. L. R. Wickham, The British Council in India, 17 May 1948; Despatch from T. Shone to P. Noel-Baker Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 15 June 1948. TNA FO 924/718.

21 - A. H. Joyce, CRO to Beighton, Treasury, 23 August 1948. TNA BW 38/8.

22 - Precis of Report on the British Council in India, 17 May 1948; UK High Commissioner Sir Archibald Nye to the Chairman of the British Council, Sir Ronald Adam, 4 April 1949. TNA BW 38/8.

23 - The Council's grant-in-aid for 1948/49 was 10% less than for 1947/48 and suffered similar cuts every year until 1953. White, 72-74.

24 - House of Commons Debate, 11 November 1948 (vol. 457 cc1713-4) <hansard.

Services which at this point employed over 100 people locally, as well as 24 London-based staff.²⁵ As austerity bit, the Council's funds were gradually cut to the bone. The fact that the Council was able to open new offices at all during this period of retrenchment is testament to the importance accorded to India (and Pakistan) but the consequences of these budget cuts were disastrous. Administrative delays had compounded the lack of funding by holding up the arrival of staff. The Council finally had to abandon the idea of finding premises in Delhi and opened its headquarters in Agra, hardly a move designed to increase British prestige nor to facilitate contacts with the federal government. "When the object is to affect the relationships between peoples, small efforts do not merely produce small effects; they produce no effect at all," concluded Wickham.²⁶

Although some progress was made – establishing contacts with universities, offering scholarships and developing the exchange of periodicals – lack of staff and funds placed a continuous brake on the Council's initial development. Wickham's report the following year noted how the Council had received over 3000 volumes for its central library but no librarian to catalogue them. The situation reached absurd proportions when the construction work for the Council's premises in Agra was charged to the budget for 1949/50 which, as the new High Commissioner Sir Archibald Nye pointed out, meant that the Council had offices and some personnel but no money to actually do anything until the next financial year began. "And meanwhile," lamented Nye, "time is slipping past, a golden opportunity is being lost and our American friends are redoubling their activities."²⁷ Ten months later Nye was writing to the CRO to make a similar argument: what use was it paying rent for expensive premises when they could not be used due to lack of furniture which had fallen victim to unforeseen cuts?²⁸

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In May 1949, Wickham was replaced by L. R. Philips. Although less strident in his denunciation of the budget cuts and their consequences, Philips' reports also bear witness to the Council staff's frustration. By the 1950s Council operations were up and running and yet continually hampered by lack of materials and staff. As Philips noted in his report for 1952/53, the field was simply too big to cover: "The Council has scratched where it could, and in spite of its financial limitations, has achieved a considerable

millbanksystems.com/commons/1948/nov/11/british-council>. Web. 1 July 2014. Wickham's May 1948 report had requested 20 London-appointed officers and 52 locally-appointed staff for the whole of India.

25 - *Precis of Report on the British Council in India*, 17 May 1948, p. 6. TNA BW 38/8.

26 - *Annual Report*, 12 January 1949. TNA BW 38/18.

27 - Sir Archibald Nye, UK High Commissioner Delhi to Sir Ronald Adam, Chairman British Council, 4 April 1949. TNA BW 38/8.

28 - Sir Archibald Nye, UK High Commissioner Delhi to Cecil Syers, CRO, 18 January 1950. TNA BW 38/8.

fund of goodwill where it has become known. This is more indicative of the possibilities of such work, however, than of the overall success of it.”²⁹ Philips’ successor meanwhile complained about the working conditions, the furniture which was “generally squalid and obviously cheap,” and of the disparity between the allowances of Council staff and those of the High Commission.³⁰ Despite the warnings of the British Council and the diplomatic services, the Council’s initial programme had been under-funded and slow to start. At best, the result had been unsatisfactory; at worse, British prestige had suffered.

AIMS AND METHODS

The Representative’s report for 1954/55 tried once again to convince both the Council’s hierarchy and the government of the need to invest more heavily in the Council’s Indian programme. The lengthy quote that follows illustrates the Council’s main concerns, beginning with the need for swift action:

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The time available to the British is getting short for establishing in India, on a more permanent basis, the educational, linguistic and cultural ties which so many Indians desire. The English language is disappearing like water running out of a bath and few have the courage, or perhaps the realisation of what is happening, to replace the plug. The older generation of Government servants and educationalists almost without exception speak excellent English but very few are emerging from the Indian universities with a command of English. While it is said that there are more UK citizens in India than ever before, they have almost completely disappeared from the Government services, Universities, Technical colleges and schools. Large numbers of younger Indians are studying and visiting the United States of America; goodwill, cultural, student, parliamentary and numerous other missions are exchanged with Russia and China. The old I.C.S. and King’s Commission Officers are retiring one by one and being replaced in many cases by those who have no British connexion. The Vice-President Dr. Radhakrishnan pointed out that the Council should do more now; conditions were in our favour and men well disposed to us in control; but in ten or fifteen years this would not be so unless we took in full the opportunity we have now. Other leading citizens of India have said much the same during the past 18 months.³¹

This document clearly echoes the position of British diplomats on the eve of Indian Independence. It indicates that the Council still saw its main goal as maintaining certain aspects of the influence that the British had held in the colonial era, notably in government services and in

29 - Annual report 1952/53. TNA BW 38/18.

30 - Handwritten notes by C. A. F. (Flux) Dundas, 1 September 1953. TNA BW 38/18.

31 - Annual Report 1954/55. TNA BW 38/18.

education. Interestingly, it also suggests that the Council could rely on the cooperation of certain members of the Indian elite in pursuing this goal. This determination to prolong British influence, before it was irredeemably lost, was the foundation upon which the Council's policy was constructed.

The 1954/55 report was particularly concerned with ensuring that key positions in Indian public services were occupied either by British citizens or by Indians with a high level of English and a sympathetic attitude to the UK. This had been one of the planks of Council policy from its earliest days in India. At the request of the Government of India, Wickham had been instrumental in finding British candidates for positions in selected institutions of higher education. In order to recruit high-quality British academics, he advocated negotiating their subsequent re-integration into UK institutions and subsidizing their salaries. This, he argued, was a necessary expense "to ensure the continuance of British influence in certain spheres of Indian cultural life." The potential influence of such appointees was "almost incalculable"; the implicit argument was that they would be able either to influence India's leaders directly, or those students who would make up the country's future elite.³² Economic and trade arguments underlay this policy as much as political ones: it was believed that students trained by British scientific and technological expertise would look to Britain for goods and services.

The Council could not expect to play any direct role in the appointment of Indians to positions of authority. It could, however, hope to foster a positive attitude to the UK among the elite generally. In India, as elsewhere, the Council concentrated its efforts on the urban educated elite in the belief that any other approach would have been not only expensive and highly challenging but also of little benefit to the UK. Science and technology were given priority over the arts, although the latter had to feature if only to prove the Council's credentials. The Council's prime interest lay however in the world of education. Firstly, in the universities, to which, in addition to helping appoint British academics, it also sent lecturers, books and film shows. The universities were seen as a site of key importance as the seedbed of India's future elite and as a breeding ground for political radicalism. Secondly, and even more importantly, the Council wished to support English language teaching, for a student population with a good command of English was the *sine qua non* for the rest of the Council's programme.

It was recognised from the outset that the question of English language teaching would require delicate handling. English had been the language of higher education and administration under British rule and the Northern states were keen to see it replaced with Hindi. For the non-Hindi speaking peoples of the South however, English was preferred as the *lingua franca* of the new state. A compromise was reached whereby Hindi was

32 - Annual Report 1948/49. TNA BW 38/18.

declared the national language of India but English was to be used for official purposes for the first fifteen years of the constitution (a timetable which proved impossible to enforce).³³ India's language policy was to be the subject of heated debates and even, at times, riots; the Council could not give the impression that it was seeking in any way to encourage the use of English or the retention of its official status. But it did attempt to maintain the standard of the English that was taught by targeting English teachers. It kept them informed of the latest methods in language teaching via lectures, a regular magazine and, for a select few, summer schools, refresher courses and even scholarships to study in the UK. Unsurprisingly this policy met with the greatest success in the Madras/Chennai region. In the North, where English was progressively replaced with local languages both in administration and in education, the Council made slower progress.³⁴

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The question of language policy is illustrative of the complexity of developing cultural relations in a post-colonial context. India's leaders, and the British Council's audience more generally, were no doubt aware of the political motivations underpinning the Council's presence. Nevertheless, cultural relations programmes may only work in so far as they are mutually beneficial and Nehru's decision to allow the Council to open offices in the new republic was based on a calculation of Indian interests. Although Nehru believed Hindi was destined to become the link language of India, with English gradually falling out of use, he did see advantage in maintaining levels of English as a world language and a language of science.³⁵ Developing Indian science and technology was one of the priorities of Nehru's government and the British Council was able to assist that policy in various ways. For example, the positions that Wickham hoped to fill with British candidates were primarily in scientific and technical institutes for which the Indian government was seeking highly-qualified staff.

India did not look only to the UK to provide expert opinion, as can be seen in the case of the University Education Commission formed in 1948. The Council put forward the name of James F. Duff, Vice-Chancellor of Durham University, who was eventually appointed to the commission where he joined two Americans, John J. Tigert, former commissioner of education of the United States and Arthur E. Morgan, an advocate

33 - Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi*, (London: Picador, 2008) p. 118-120. The issue has recently resurfaced following the election of the Bharatiya Janata party.

34 - Representative's Handing-Over Notes, 1 September 1950. TNA BW 38/38.

35 - Sarvepalli Gopal, "The English Language in India since Independence, and its future Role", twelfth Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture, University of Cambridge, 1988. Web accessed 2 July 2014 <<http://www.cambridgetrust.org/partners/jawaharlal-nehru-memorial-lectures/>>. It has been argued that the current-day success of the Indian IT industry stems largely from the Nehru government's educational policy and most specifically its retention of English in the many engineering schools which it set up. Guha, 697-698.

of progressive education and small communities. The remaining seven members were all Indian; two of them held degrees from British universities while the Chairman, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, was an Oxford professor.³⁶ Radhakrishnan later became Vice-President of India and it was in this capacity that he was quoted by Dundas in his report for 1954/55. The University Education Commission, whose recommendations were to shape the future development of Indian universities, provides a perfect example of the way in which the British hoped to exert an indirect influence on Indian policy. It also demonstrates why the British feared their position was being eroded by American competition.

At the time of Indian independence, official American cultural diplomacy was still suffering from the cutbacks imposed by Congress after the war but the situation changed rapidly following the passage of the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948. By the mid 1950s, the US had set up reading rooms in ten Indian cities and was running bilateral educational exchanges funded by the sale of surplus war goods. American philanthropic organizations, meanwhile, continued to support various educational projects and the Fulbright programme was extended to include India in 1950. The positive effects of this policy were offset by American criticism of Indian non-alignment, wrangles over food aid and, in 1954, the establishment of a formal US-Pakistan alliance.³⁷ Nevertheless, the desire to limit American influence was clearly a motivating factor for the Council and for British diplomats. It is no coincidence that the Commonwealth University Interchange Scheme, run conjointly by the Council and the Association of the Universities of the British Commonwealth, was set up shortly after the Fulbright Programme.³⁸

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THE COLD WAR

British cultural diplomacy in India, like that of the US, was inevitably affected by the Cold War, not least because of the Soviet and Chinese presence identified in the report cited above. A year after Independence, the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was expressing concern about the impact of Communist propaganda in India and highlighting the importance of educational and cultural ties in combating this.³⁹ In fact,

36 - Annual Report 1948/49. TNA BW 38/18. Report of the University Education Commission (December 1948-August 1949), Government of India. Web accessed 4 July 2014. <<http://www.teindia.nic.in/Files/Reports/CCR/>>

37 - Sarah Ellen Graham, *Engaging India: Public Diplomacy and Indo-American Relations to 1957*, (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2012), p. 20-30.

38 - *Proceedings of the Sixth Congress of the Universities of the British Commonwealth*, 1948 (AUBC, 1951), 67.

39 - E. Bevin to A. Creech-Jones Colonial Secretary, 22 September 1948. CAB 124/1029. Quoted by Eastment, p. 262.

Britain had already adopted a dual propaganda policy in which “offensive” propaganda aimed at attacking and exposing communism was to be balanced with “positive” propaganda which would promote the British way of life, thereby indirectly demonstrating its superiority to the Communist model.⁴⁰ The latter approach was precisely that of the British Council. The Foreign Office displayed, however, a clear preference for the offensive propaganda produced by its covert branch, the Information Research Department (IRD), whilst the CRO was slow to display any interest in the question of anti-communist propaganda in India. It was only under FO pressure that it agreed in late 1948 to disseminate IRD material to the Indian government, though there is little doubt that IRD material had been released in India via British Information Services prior to this.⁴¹

In practice therefore, the British Council was not fully developed as a weapon of anti-communism during the early years of the Cold War. In fact, it may even have been one of its victims. The decision to rearm during the Korean War forced the Labour government to make further cuts to its budget. Like the NHS, though less controversially, the information services found themselves in the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s line of fire. The Foreign Office was determined to protect its propaganda programme and in effect the British Council was sacrificed to ensure the survival and even the expansion of the IRD.⁴²

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By the 1950s, the British Council Representatives’ reports were paying increasing attention to Soviet and Chinese influences on India’s cultural and educational life. At the end of 1950, Philips dedicated a separate memorandum to the growth of interest in communism among staff and students of colleges since his arrival in India.⁴³ Philips identified three factors which were primarily responsible for this state of affairs: the Indian government’s failings (leading to low living standards of many students, food shortages and rising costs); a rise in Anti-Americanism stimulated by the Korean War; and Russian propaganda which had increased in both quality and output. He concluded that as the British way of life promoted by the Council was the antithesis of communist philosophy, an audience

40 - Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-communist Propaganda 1945-1953: the Information Research Department*, (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 63. Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) p. 49-53.

41 - The dissemination of IRD material to the Indian government was ostensibly as part of an exchange of anti-communist documentation, though in reality the primary aim was to “educate” the Indian government itself. Defty, 116-117.

42 - Defty, 163-164. See also, C. J. Morris and W. Scott Lucas, “A very British Crusade: the Information Research Department and the beginning of the Cold War”, in *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-1951*, Ed. Richard J. Aldrich, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) p. 85-110; J. M. Lee, “British cultural diplomacy and the cold war: 1946-1961”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9, 1 (1998) p. 112-134.

43 - L. R. Philips, memorandum to Commonwealth Department, “Political atmosphere in the Mofussil”, 15 December 1950. TNA BW 38/17.

which was attracted to communism was less receptive to all that the Council offered. The following year's report put it more clearly: a pro-Soviet attitude in some colleges led to misinterpretations of Britain and "tended to make the non-political penetration of the Council harder than it would have been in an atmosphere predisposed to receive it." The disaffected were not unfriendly, but showed signs of "cynicism and unwillingness to be persuaded."⁴⁴ Despite the frank admission that the Council's aim was to mould the opinions of its audience, the idea that the UK was engaged in an ideological conflict was not used to justify the Council's presence in India. Moreover, if Philips had hoped that evoking Communist penetration would protect his budget, he failed: his report ends with an account of a film show to 1200 students, where 500 more students had to be refused entry, to which a Council official in London appended the comment that the film van had fallen victim to the latest round of cuts.⁴⁵

British Council representatives in India were happy to contribute to positive propaganda, in the sense of promoting British values and attempting to shape Indian public opinion in ways favourable to the UK. Close involvement in anti-Communist propaganda was however perceived as potentially dangerous for the Council. The Representative's Report for 1952/53 warned that, "to participate in the present drive against Communism would be to give the lie to all that the Council has ever said or done, and lose the natural and ungrudging entrée to the universities that it now possesses." This report argued that the fundamental challenge was to improve the living conditions of the poor and the working classes and it was here that the Council's interest lay:

By showing that Britain has achieved that end by democratic, unviolent means, and that the welfare state is a reality, the Council has done its logical and legitimate share in turning the student mind to the possibility of other solutions less prejudicial to the liberty of the citizen.⁴⁶

The British example was supposed to prove that a viable alternative to Communist revolution did exist and was pertinent for India. Such an approach was reminiscent of Bevin's earlier declarations in favour of 'Third Force' propaganda. In practice the promotion of British-style social democracy had struggled to take off under Labour and was even less likely to win the support of the Conservative government which had since come to power.

Nonetheless, there was a general consensus that the British reaction to Communism should differ to that of the Americans. Council reports claimed that the efforts of the United States Information services, although much

44 - Annual Report 1950/51. TNA BW 38/18.

45 - Comment added to "Political atmosphere in the Mofussil", 22 January 1951. TNA BW 38/17.

46 - Annual Report 1952/53. TNA BW 38/18.

better funded and in many ways impressive, were in fact counterproductive because they tended to reinforce the impression that the Americans were war-minded. In short, American propaganda was too blatantly anti-Communist. The difficulties encountered by Britain's ally and rival were not however a cause for celebration as the rise of anti-Americanism was also considered detrimental to British efforts, since Britain was seen to lie in America's shadow.⁴⁷ In the meantime, Soviet and Chinese cultural missions and exchange programmes continued to receive much positive publicity. Indeed Soviet propaganda appeared to be gaining influence as it became more moderate and less concerned with attacking the West.⁴⁸ The strength of Chinese propaganda lay in its appeal to a joint Asian identity and to past oppression by the West.⁴⁹ Both examples thereby provided evidence in favour of a positive rather than offensive propaganda approach.

THE COMMONWEALTH ANGLE

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The Council was originally identified as a means to encourage India to remain in the Commonwealth, yet once it did so, the Commonwealth virtually disappeared from this story. In the archival documents under consideration here, there was no discussion of the Council's potential role in consolidating the new multicultural Commonwealth that was created by virtue of India's decision to join it. India was consistently treated as different to and separate from the other members. For instance, the British Council invited Canada, Australia and New Zealand to contribute books and materials for British Council libraries and exhibitions in India, but no such invitation appears to have been extended to India to make similar contributions.⁵⁰ This suggests that the Council continued to imagine a role for itself in projecting the "British peoples" rather than in promoting the Commonwealth as an association of independent nations.

The Council's experience in India was unique in other respects.⁵¹ Firstly, it was able to count on the full support and collaboration of British diplomats and information services in India. This was not the case elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Secondly, the Council managed to obtain official approval in India far more quickly and with more ease than in the 'old' Dominions. Perhaps as a newly independent state faced with a vast education

47 - Annual Report 1952/53. TNA BW 38/18. C. A. F. Dundas to R. Seymour, extract from minutes of the Conference of Representatives from the Regions, New Delhi, 1-5 February 1954. TNA BW 38/17.

48 - Annual Report 1951/52 & 1952/53. TNA BW 38/18.

49 - Report from Regional Representative in Madras, 3 January 1955. TNA BW 38/17.

50 - Annual Report 1948/49. TNA BW 38/18.

51 - For an account of the British Council's policy in other parts of the Commonwealth, see Alice Byrne, "The British Council and the British World, 1939-1954", GRAAT On-Line, issue 13, March 2013, "Dynamics of Cultural Exchange in the English-Speaking World" ed. Trevor Harris.

programme, India had more to gain from this partnership. India was also clearly interested in using international cultural relations as an instrument of policy and in 1950 set up its own equivalent of the British Council, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), making it the first Commonwealth nation to do so. There is a certain irony to this since the Council had pursued a policy of trying to persuade the Dominions to establish their own "sister" councils for many years to no avail. The Council does not appear to have been directly involved in the creation of the ICCR, nor did it have particularly close links with its founder Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the minister of education. Indeed, Sir John Sargent left the Indian ministry of Education to join the British Council, not because he did not wish to work for the new Indian republic but because he could not work under Azad.⁵² Nevertheless, possessing a counterpart was in the interests of both the Council and the ICCR.

Before the end of World War Two, the British Council had twice been approached by groups of Indian politicians and academics seeking to facilitate Indian cultural relations with other countries, possibly by setting up a new organization.⁵³ On both occasions the Council had been happy to encourage such a development as it made it easier to emphasize the reciprocal nature of its proposals. From its inception, the Council had been concerned with promoting not only British culture but also "mutual interchange" with other peoples. Rex Leeper justified this approach on purely pragmatic grounds, arguing that it made the Council's target audience more receptive.⁵⁴ But by the end of the war the idea of using cultural relations (as opposed to cultural propaganda) as a means to encourage understanding between peoples in the interests of world peace had gained greater currency within the Council. Yet no evidence of this reorientation can be found in the Council archives dealing with India. Reciprocity, it was argued, had to represent the cornerstone of the Council's programme in India, not because of its inherent quality or even the benefit it would bring to the British public, but as the best means of overcoming Indian suspicion of the Council.⁵⁵ This policy was adopted as being in Britain's best interests, although it did help Indian cultural institutions to develop international contacts, whether through the exchange of periodicals between learned societies or on-the-spot assistance to an Indian ballet on tour in the UK.⁵⁶

52 - Sir Terence Shone to Sir Paul Patrick, CRO, 10 September 1947. TNA BW 38/5.

53 - L. Amery to M. Robertson, 10 November 1944. TNA BW 38/1. T. W. Morray, "India and the British Council" 31 January 1945, Appendix V. TNA BW 38/1. T. W. Morray to A. Gillan, 27 January 1945; K. Nag, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, to Joint Committee on Cultural Relations with India, British Council, 20 July 1946 (including summary of discussions in 1945). TNA BW 2/335.

54 - Leeper, 1934, quoted by Taylor, 143-144.

55 - T. W. Morray, "India and the British Council", 31 January 1945. TNA BW 38/1. W. L. R. Wickham, The British Council in India, 17 May 1948. TNA FO 924/718.

56 - Annual Report 1948/49. TNA BW 38/18.

Finally the CRO showed no inclination to formulate a specific Commonwealth cultural policy, as evidenced by the decision of the Commonwealth Secretary of State, Lord Swinton, to decide unilaterally to close the Council's offices in Australia and New Zealand in 1954, while simultaneously defending the Council's work in India and Pakistan.⁵⁷ In this respect, Swinton anticipated the implementation of the 1953 Drogheda Report which assigned high priority to the Council's work in India. The Report held that existing educational and cultural ties between the 'old' Dominions and the UK were already sufficiently strong as to make the Council's presence redundant, whereas the educational and developmental work of the Council was a vitally important means of maintaining ties with the former Indian colonies.⁵⁸ It was not until December 1954 that the Government announced its acceptance of the broad lines of the Report, largely because rather than reducing costs it called for greater investment in the overseas information services.⁵⁹ The British Council finally found new money and a long-term commitment to its work forthcoming but at the price of a radical redefinition of its mission which from now on was to concentrate on educational work in "under-developed" countries. The main thrust of the Council's policy in India would shift from maintaining the elite in a British / Commonwealth sphere of influence to a development agenda.

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In the first decade of the British Council's existence, many of its leading members imagined it would fulfil an imperial role. This was never, however, a viable option, as became fully evident by the end of World War Two. By sustaining and developing the cultural, educational and linguistic ties between the UK and its former colonies, the British Council nonetheless held the potential to consolidate the emerging Commonwealth. In India, as in the 'old' Dominions, it was felt that Britain had left a cultural legacy which held the key to future relations. But in India this legacy was obviously more limited, superficial and contested than elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

Despite the rhetoric of reciprocity which was used to promote international cultural relations, the British Council, like Whitehall, considered its principal task was to perpetuate British influence in the new republic. Hence the emphasis it placed on finding British candidates for key positions in educational institutions and on maintaining links with the Indian elite. Higher education was considered the most important site for exerting this influence. Priority was also given to supporting English language teaching, although the political sensitivity of this issue implied

57 - House of Lords Debate "Overseas Offices of British Council", 07 April 1954 vol. 186 cc1057-601057. Web accessed 7 July 2014. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1954/apr/07/overseas-offices-of-british-council#column_1057>

58 - Overseas Information Services: The Report of the Drogheda Committee, 13 November 1953. TNA CAB 129/64.

59 - White, 99.

a cautious attitude. Yet the Council could only succeed if its programme proved to be mutually beneficial to both parties. The Indian government welcomed the British Council (and its rivals) because of the assistance it provided to students, teachers, researchers and government officials in many different fields.

Ensuring the continuity of British influence was a tenet of the British Council's policy in India. This was seen as the best way to counter the presence of rival cultural influences, especially that of the United States. With the intensification of the Cold War in the early 1950s, increasing attention was paid to the success of Soviet and Chinese cultural missions in India and to communist penetration of the universities. Although the Council was seen as a means of promoting Britain and British values, it was not fully mobilized as a vector for Cold War propaganda and actually suffered from the tense international climate. In the context of cutbacks due first to austerity, then the Korean War, the Council fared badly in the competition with British information and propaganda services over scarce resources. The most striking feature of British cultural diplomacy in India over the period 1945-1955 is in fact the government's parsimony. Despite the full support of the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office, successive British governments were reluctant to invest in cultural relations programmes which were unlikely to yield short-term results. Despite the Council's subsequent expansion in India, a recent report confirmed that British policy ultimately failed to prevent the United States from becoming India's dominant cultural partner, while even today the UK is criticized by Indians for its lack of investment in cultural relations between the two countries.⁶⁰

60 - *Re-Imagine. India-UK Cultural Relations in the 21st Century. Voices and Perspectives.* Report published by the British Council, 2013. Web accessed 5 October 2015. <http://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/voices_and_perspectives.pdf>