'A call to arms': The Committee on British Communities Abroad, 1919-20

The years immediately after the First World War are commonly seen as a time of ferment: a period of instability after chaos. To the conservative press in Britain it was a time of world unrest. At home, Britain faced significant challenges in the form of economic fluctuation, industrial strife, and trouble in Ireland. However, the wider British World; that is to say, the British empire and its approaches, as well as those areas where Britain had significant interests, were at the centre of this storm. From Nigeria to India to Ireland, a rash of revolts, tribal unrest, nationalism, and Bolshevik intrigue stretched the resources of an over-extended Empire.[1]

At another level too, this post-war period was uniquely formative. Four years of war had placed considerable strain on the machinery of government. Whatever cracks had begun to appear before 1914 had undoubtedly widened by the conclusion of hostilities. The British Foreign Office and Diplomatic and Consular Services were a case in point. For some time before 1914 concern had been expressed at various levels about the need for reform. The war exacerbated these perceived weaknesses but allowed no opportunity to address them. In 1919 reforms were introduced but they did not entirely assuage previous criticisms.[2]

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[1] See, J. Darwin, Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War, 1918-1922 (New York, 1981); K. Jeffrey, The British Army and the Crisis of Empire 1918-1922 (Manchester, 1984); D. Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace: The Creation of the Modern Middle East, 1918-1922 (London, 1989); J. Fisher, "The Interdepartmental Committee on Eastern Unrest and British Responses to Bolshevik and Other Intrigues Against the Empire during the 1920s," Journal of Asian History, xxxiv (2000), pp. 1-34.

[2] Z. Steiner and M. Dockrill, "The Foreign Office Reforms, 1919-21," Historical Journal, xvii (1974), pp. 131-56. For the Foreign Office during the war, see Steiner, "The Foreign Office and the War," in F. H. Hinsley (ed), British Foreign Policy Under Sir Edward Grey (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 516-31. On the

These various pressures were not necessarily new but their coincidence over a short space of time was. Collectively, they called into question the ability of the British people and their leaders and the armed services to ensure continued British predominance. At one level this struggle was conducted at meetings of the British Cabinet, and in Whitehall departments. It was also conducted on the ground: in the deserts of Mesopotamia, against Zaghlul in Egypt, and, ingloriously, at Amritsar. On the domestic front it found expression in efforts to reform the compulsory education sector, in debates about the Gold Standard and the move towards retrenchment, in attempts to institute long-awaited public housing schemes, and in discussions about imperial efficiency. However, the future of the British world, infused as it was with so many uncertainties, was also being pondered in another, parallel, context.

In December 1919, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, sanctioned the creation of a committee to consider the future welfare of British expatriate communities. The Committee on British Communities Abroad, which met on nineteen occasions in the winter of 1919-20, is the focus of this article.[3] This, rather curious episode in British administrative history, has been rather overlooked, partly because only a relatively small portion of the material that it generated has survived.[4] Although its report survived, the evidential trail is otherwise

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shortcomings of the Consular service regarding trade, see D. C. M. Platt, "The Role of the British Consular Service in Overseas Trade, 1825-1914," The Economic History Review, xv (1963), pp. 494-512.

[3] The Committee's report was published as, "Report of the Foreign Office Committee on British Communities Abroad," cmd. 672, 22 March 1920.

[4] Some of the Committee's minutes and associated material was apparently misfiled among the Commercial Department, Foreign Office [hereafter cited as FO] 368, series at The National Archives, Kew [hereafter cited as TNA]. Its referencing in the Foreign Office card index indicated the general series of political correspondence, TNA, FO 371, as its intended home. This may have been due to a clerical error but more likely it reflected confusion and overlapping between various Foreign Office

scattered. Furthermore, as will become apparent, its brief was much too ambitious and ill-defined, leading to overlapping with the functions of various government departments. This was, in part, symptomatic of its focus which straddled foreign and imperial concerns; something which gave the committee a slightly hybridized aspect. Above all, however, in view of post-war retrenchment, it will be shown that, notwithstanding the interest taken in its deliberations by Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, among others, its recommendations were destined not to be acted upon. Indeed, although there is a striking resemblance between many of the committee's recommendations and the later activities of the British Council, the latter was not fully aware of these antecedents.[5] After exploring the committee's origins, the first and shorter section of the article outlines its membership, and the key areas of investigation. These are discussed under two headings, firstly, educational provision and the inculcation of Britishness, and, secondly, and more briefly, commercial interests. This section also outlines the committee's conclusions. The second section of the article then explores at greater length the extent to which the committee might be said to have failed as well as the reasons for that failure.

Origins

The Committee on British Communities Abroad might be seen as the product of the convergence of several strands in British foreign and imperial policy in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Above all, its discussions echoed concerns about Britishness and

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departments on the issues discussed by the Committee. Philip Taylor's excellent study outlines the activities of the Committee but does not examine it in detail or with reference to the concerns of expatriate communities: P. M. Taylor, The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919-1939 (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 132-35.

[5] It is mentioned briefly in F. Donaldson, The British Council: the First Fifty Years (London, 1984), p. 15, but was overlooked in a short history of the British Council prepared in 1948 for the Treasury; TNA, FO 924/636.

national survival which had emerged after the second Boer War and which mutated into constructive imperialism after the First World War.[6] Similarly, it drew upon concerns about relative economic decline and its discussions resonated with ideas about the unity of the British people which had emerged in the late nineteenth century, and which were then reiterated after the Boer War, often under the aegis of the Round Table movement and in the context of the national efficiency debate.[7] This genesis, from a confluence of imperial ideas, some of them of long-standing, is also suggested by the continuing involvement in such debates of several key imperialists; notably, Alfred, Lord Milner, Leopold Amery, and William, Lord Selborne.[8] None was directly involved in the business of the committee, but the wider conception of the British world which their ideas embodied, echoed among other things, in the investigations of the Dominions Royal Commission, undoubtedly appealed to those expatriate communities, often on the fringes of formal empire, who felt that their interests had been neglected by government.[9]

In the context of the First World War, the genesis of the committee might also be seen in the varying contributions of expatriate communities to the war effort. In some cases, such as

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[6] On this theme, see S. Constantine, The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940 (London, 1984), passim.

[7] A. Bosco & A. May (eds), The Round Table: The Empire and Commonwealth and British Foreign Policy (London, 1997).

[8] It is also suggested by other manifestations of patriotism. See, for example, D. S. A. Bell, "The Idea of a Patriotic Queen? The Monarchy, the Constitution, and the Iconographic Order of Great Britain, 1860-1900," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 34 (2006), pp. 3-21. I have benefited from discussion of these ideas with Dr Kent Fedorowich of the University of the West of England, Bristol, England.

[9] Wm. R. Louis, In the Name of God Go! Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill (New York/London, 1992), pp. 81-2. The report of the Commission may be seen at TNA, C[olonial] O[ffice] 323/758/34.

Argentina, those communities organized directly for war and contributed signally.[10] Others did not and to an extent, spasmodic efforts during the war to investigate their character must be seen to reflect a desire to leave no stones unturned in the struggle for national survival.[11] This urge was also reflected in the establishment, with the initial support of the Foreign Office, and of the imperial statesman, Lord Selborne, of branches of the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, from 1914.[12] Similarly, it drew upon efforts that were made in 1917 to obtain information about the nature of educational provision among expatriate British communities. The committee also reflected long-standing concerns about the representation of British commercial interests overseas and generally about the Consular and Diplomatic Services. During the war especially, expatriate communities felt that their commercial interests, often undermined by constraints on shipping and overseas markets, were being let down by a lack of official intervention. Consequently, after the war, the commercial attaché service was reformed, as indeed, as previously noted, were the Foreign Office and Diplomatic and Consular Services.[13] To these factors was added a belief that reconstruction, besides requiring the efficient use of resources in the British Isles, would also require the recapturing and development of overseas markets. To Milner and Amery, as well as to various patriotic

[10] A. L. Holder (ed), Activities of the British Community in Argentina During the Great War 1914-1919 (Buenos Aires, 1920), passim.

[11] Milner, Amery and Selborne had also sought greater efficiency in the use of man-power during the war; J. O. Stubbs, "Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918," English Historical Review, CCCXLV (1972), pp. 717-54. According to press reports there were three million British subjects resident in foreign countries; TNA, FO 369/799/71166, "Patriotism and Empire," Daily Express, 11 December & Nottingham Guardian, 12 December, 1914, in "The Patriotic League of Britons: a few Press Opinions".

[12] The first appeal, in December 1914, was sent to five hundred and twenty diplomatic and consular staff; TNA, FO 369/854/185, Lord Aldenham to Under-Secretary, 27 July 1915.

[13] Steiner & Dockrill, "The Foreign Office"; E. Maisel, "The Formation of the Department of Overseas Trade, 1919-26," Journal of Contemporary History, 24 (1989), pp. 169-90.

organizations, this might involve expatriate business and financial interests.[14] This, in turn, related to ideas for the more efficient use of empire which characterized thinking on the inter-war Empire. To that extent the committee's investigations were confluent with the Dominions Royal Commission, as well as the Imperial Development Board, to which it gave rise. The basic premise of the committee was the existence, at varying levels, among expatriate communities of those cultural assumptions which some writers have identified in the pre-war Empire of settlement.[15] There is indeed, in the language as well as the aims of the committee, much that resonates with various manifestations of Edwardian imperialism and their resurgence during and after the First World War.[16] This was true, among other things, in its promotion of Empire Day and other patriotic celebrations, and in the participation in the committee's deliberations, directly or otherwise, of key figures involved in the promotion of British values, as well as the wider imperial networks, to which they belonged.[17] The need to cultivate such ideals, and the need to capitalize upon instances of unity forged among expatriate communities in war-time, was also an important element in the emergence of the committee. So too was an appreciation that the Empire, whilst it had attained its greatest territorial extent, faced many challenges, not least from its traditional rival, France.

Membership and remit

[14] Constantine, The Making, p. 51. E. Wrench, Struggle (London, 1935), pp. 157, 422-23.

[15] A. S. Thompson, "Imperial Ideology in Edwardian Britain," in Bosco & May, Round Table, p. 4.

[16] J. Mackenzie (ed), Imperialism and Popular Culture (Manchester, 1992), passim.

[17] This was true, for example, of Evelyn, later Sir Evelyn, Wrench, founder of the Overseas Club (1910) English Speaking Union (1918), and All Peoples' Association (1930), who appeared before the Committee. His network included senior politicians and imperialists, Lionel Curtis, Arthur Balfour, and John Buchan, and the Lords Milner, Selborne, Meath, Lugard, and Harcourt; journalists, Lord Northcliffe and J L Garvin; and diplomats, Arthur, Lord Nicolson, and Sir James Rennell Rodd. On Meath, see J. D. Springhall, "Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire," Journal of Contemporary History, 5 (1970), pp. 97-111.

When the Committee on British Communities Abroad began its meetings in December 1919, it did so with the express purpose of considering how best to "foster a greater spirit of solidarity among British communities abroad". Its second aim was to contemplate how to "make British ideals more generally known, and appreciated by foreign nations".[18] As such it was concerned up to a point with propaganda. As Philip Taylor has demonstrated, the organisation of foreign propaganda in Britain was, however, in some disarray during and after the war.[19] As the committee met, reform of the Foreign Office was in progress and with rationalisation of its News Department, which had previously dominated foreign propaganda.

The Committee met initially under the chairmanship of the senior diplomat, Sir Charles Eliot and then, on his appointment as Ambassador to Tokyo, under Sir John Tilley, an Assistant Secretary of State at the Foreign Office.[20] Besides Foreign Office officials, it was also attended by representatives from the Consular Service, the Department of Overseas Trade, the Foreign Trade Department, and by two prominent businessmen, J Arthur Aiton and Irvine Geddes. The profile of its members was interesting and reflected the rather diluted handling of issues bearing on foreign trade and, more generally, of British interests overseas. Another member, Sir Edward Denison Ross, Director of the School of Oriental Studies, London University, had experience and considerable knowledge of eastern affairs, as did Sir Maurice de Bunsen of the Foreign Office. In addition, de Bunsen had detailed knowledge of South America where he had recently undertaken a fact finding mission. There he had networked extensively among British expatriate communities, and had also learnt of the unsatisfactory

[18] Unless otherwise stated all remaining references are to the report of the Committee. See n.3.

[19] Taylor, The Projection, pp. 24-25. On this subject generally, see also, M. L. Sanders, 'Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War', Historical Journal, xviii (1975), pp. 119-46; M. L. Sanders and P. M. Taylor, British Propaganda During the First World War (Cambridge, etc., 1982).

[20] It is also known as the Tilley Committee.

handling by officials of British commercial interests. Follett Holt, who attended the committee as a representative of the Foreign Trade Department, had accompanied de Bunsen on this tour. The specific needs of other vocal expatriate communities were reflected in the presence on the committee of Roland Nugent, of the Foreign Trade Department, and William Codrington of the Foreign Office; both of whom were interested in Moroccan affairs.[21] The committee's discussions were based upon a wide range of oral or written submissions.[22] Some witnesses were drawn from particular expatriate communities and others had developed knowledge of Britain's overseas interests through educational, commercial, or official activities. Several had been or were still serving in the Foreign Office or Diplomatic or Consular Services and some, such as Lt. General, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the Chief Scout, had other specific expertise which was deemed useful to the committee.

The committee had an extremely broad geographical remit. Having initially proposed to include the formal empire in its deliberations, this idea was abandoned. Nevertheless, the only countries which it did not consider outside the Empire were Russia and the United States of America. Furthermore, it had a very broad agenda and its members clearly felt unsure precisely what was expected of them and how far they were expected to go in making detailed recommendations.[23] Broadly, their activities fell into two main areas. The first area was the inculcating of British values and cohesion among expatriate communities, adults as well as children, and extending those values to foreign peoples. Thus, the committee considered at

[21] Nugent especially, was outspoken on the need for more active support for British commercial interests there. In November 1921, Codrington, who had serviced the committee, was appointed to the Consulate General at Tangier as first secretary. The other members of the committee were Sir William Beveridge, Capt. George Bowyer, MP, Sir Frederick Butler (department of overseas trade), and Thomas Dunlop (consular service).

[22] The committee's report recorded thirty-eight personal witnesses and fifteen written submissions.

[23] See, for example, TNA, FO 368/2234/947/174306, minute by Codrington, 30 January 1920, and minutes of the committee's eighth and ninth meetings.

length the issue of establishing or assisting British schools overseas. As the committee's report noted, the purpose was two-fold; firstly, to provide schools for expatriate communities: secondly, to "spread…a knowledge of the English language and an appreciation of British ideals among foreign peoples". Besides formal education, the committee also discussed the possibility of encouraging local British papers and the usefulness of British libraries in foreign countries. Further, it hoped to capitalize upon patriotic sentiment generated during the war. In 1916, Lord Milner, arguing that the Union Jack should be hoisted on Government buildings on Empire Day, noted that in 1914, Empire Day had been celebrated in over thirty-six thousand British schools world-wide. He continued, "Empire Day…has become to all the scattered communities of the British race the symbol of that unity of feeling which possesses them all with a common loyalty to ideals of freedom, justice, and tolerance for which the British Empire stands throughout the world".[24] Motivated by precisely these aims, the committee discussed the value of patriotic associations and whether or not British representatives overseas had sufficient funds to promote the celebration of the King's Birthday and other such festivals. Similarly, the committee considered the "value of the Boy Scout Movement as a means of instilling British ideals into the children of British subjects in foreign countries, and as a means of making these ideals known to foreign people[s]". A second and related area on which the committee focused was the improvement in British commercial prospects. Specifically, it was asked to consider the policy to be adopted towards British chambers of commerce and the possibility of spreading commercial and political propaganda. With regard to both of these areas, in order to improve the existing situation, as well as to implement these changes in expatriate communities, it was necessary to gather information about them. This, in turn, raised a number of issues bearing upon consular representation. Although it had long been part of consular duties to register British subjects in each consular district, the committee discussed the possibility of systematizing the process.

[24] Hansard (Lords), 5 April 1916, cols 604-22.

Educational provision and the inculcation of Britishness

Notwithstanding its broad geographical remit, on a number of key issues the committee's conclusions were informed to a great extent by the experience of particular expatriate communities. In the case of educational provision, which, as the committee acknowledged, was possibly it's most important brief, this was especially true of Morocco. When the Committee on British Communities Abroad met, besides interviewing Herbert Fisher, President of the Board of Education, it also called upon several individuals who had direct involvement in educational initiatives in Morocco to give evidence.[25] Although some argued that the children of expatriates, as their parents paid no taxes in the United Kingdom, were not entitled to a state funded education, the committee noted, "large numbers of children, British by birth, citizens of the Empire, are growing up ignorant not only of British ideals, but even of the English language". In short, it was "in the material interest of the Empire as a whole that it should be done"; an aim which struck a chord with pre-war interest in "educated and instructed patriotism".[26] In terms of central government funding it was felt that distance and lack of means should dictate in which communities such schools were established. Families which currently sent their children back to Britain for schooling should be encouraged to do so, as this "would make them better British citizens". In the case of small British communities it was suggested that foreign children might be admitted "as the best possible method of spreading British ideals, [and of] enabling other nations to appreciate correctly British thought

[25] Among them was Richard, 5th Earl of Onslow who, besides being President of the British Morocco Merchants Association [hereafter BMMA], was also Chairman of the Moroccan Schools Association. The BMMA's members comprised merchants in Britain and Morocco who were involved in the Moroccan trade. It met in London from February 1916.

[26] See, by J. G. C. Greenlee, "The ABCs of Imperial Unity," Canadian Journal of History, 14 (1979), pp. 49-64, 'Imperial Studies and the Unity of Empire', Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 7 (1979), pp. 321-35.

and feeling, and…avoiding many needless misunderstandings". In such cases, however, a clear majority of the children would have to be British in order to maintain the "British character" of the school. As an example of the proposed arrangement, the committee instanced the sponsorship of the Lycée in London by the French government.[27]

More broadly the committee recommended that British representatives should report on the number of British children requiring education and, in cases where there were twenty or thirty such children, they should also report on the ability of their parents as well as other individuals to contribute towards it. Local committees might then be formed to report on these and other issues to a joint committee of the Foreign Office and Board of Education. That body would then consider each case and, where necessary, appoint investigators to visit and report on the feasibility of establishing a school. In some cases, notably, in several South American countries, in Constantinople, in Egypt and in China it was felt that there was already sufficient evidence of the need for such schools to justify an investigation on the spot. In the case of Scandinavia it was decided that school provision for British children was good and that no additional measures were necessary.

With regard to subsidies, the training, provision and salaries of teachers, and examinations and inspections, the committee suggested that the Board of Education should also take an interest equal to that of schools in England. The committee advised a range of other measures to attract and motivate teachers and pupils and to foster links between British teachers and national educational institutions, as well as between British schools in foreign countries and schools and universities in Britain. Further ideas to build upon networks and established ties included the provision of funds within particular English counties to enable children whose parents had emigrated from those counties to return to England for their education. Such

[27] The Lycée had just been offered the loan of its current home in South Kensington, London, by the British Government.

funds might be linked to well known local or regional schools and universities and it was further suggested that shipping companies might be approached with the idea of introducing scholars' rates. Similarly, it was recommended that wealthy expatriate business communities might be approached to support the establishment of schools.

As for alternative means of spreading an interest in and knowledge of British ideals, the committee praised the model of the Anglo-French Society, as well as the work of The English Language Union, the various British schools of Archaeology, and in particular, the British Institute in Florence. Having obtained evidence from these bodies, it was felt that the Institute might form the model for a network of similar centres, each of which would have courses for foreign people in English literature, history, and art as well as a library and reading rooms with books and periodicals in the English language. In recommending the idea the committee contemplated an organisation such as the Alliance Française,[28] and as such was a forerunner of the British Council. It was felt that this measure, together with greater efforts by the British book trade, would go some way to rectify the reported scarcity of works in the English language in many foreign countries.

More specifically, the committee suggested that copies of the best standard, English technical books and journals might be made available in every consulate overseas. By such means it was hoped to overcome a belief among foreign nations that "Great Britain counts for very little in the world of science". In making its recommendations on these issues the committee also referred to and endorsed the conclusions of an earlier Department of Information committee. That body, besides proposing measures for improving the circulation of English

[28] Founded in Paris in 1883, to spread the French language and culture world-wide; its London branch opened in 1908.

language material abroad, also suggested investigations into facilities for the reception and education of foreign students at British universities and technical schools.[29]

As regards the cohesion of British communities and the inculcation of British values, the committee also made several recommendations. Anglican churches were felt to form a focal point for many British communities overseas and their chaplains, as well as the expatriate committees which often supported such churches, were seen to be a point of contact with Britons who did not otherwise come into contact with diplomatic or consular staff. Consequently, the committee advised that existing government grants to these Churches should in principle be maintained. In particular it was felt that the presence of the church boosted British prestige in Christian and non-Christian countries alike.

The committee was also supportive of the work of patriotic societies and had taken evidence from senior representatives from the Overseas Club and Patriotic League and from the Royal Colonial Institute. Although it was not suggested that such bodies should receive official financial support, the committee was concerned that where possible they might amalgamate in case, with the return of peace, their support might dwindle.[30] In fact, the committee perceived considerable scope for such bodies in supporting the provision of hospitals and nursing institutions for the poor, especially in sea ports where British seamen called in number, and were often a drain on consular resources, in the establishment of friendly societies, and more generally in support of the various educational activities previously outlined. Similarly, the

[29] The Department of Information committee met from the summer of 1917 under Sir Henry Newbolt; Taylor, The Projection, pp. 128-30.

[30] The Overseas Club and the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas amalgamated in 1918 to form the Overseas Club and Patriotic League. The organisations differed in that the League, unlike the Club, focused its activities solely on expatriate communities in foreign countries.

committee recorded its view that British Consuls should have sufficient funds to hold gatherings of the British community on the King's Birthday and other patriotic festivals.

Having listened to Baden-Powell's evidence in connection with the Boy Scout and Girl Guides movements, the committee did not envisage official financial support of any kind but considered those movements to be the most effective way of "drawing together the youth of all the classes of the British community abroad and fostering in them British ideals". Although a number of foreign countries had adopted and adapted the Scout movement, the principles on which it and the Girl Guides were based were seen to be quintessentially British. The success of the Scouts was perceived to be in "bringing up boys with the British conception of chivalry and manliness".[31] At the most basic level Scouts world-wide were bound by the Scout Promise or Oath, which embodied many of these ideals.[32] As Allen Warren has noted, scouting and guiding provided a "cement," not only for the Commonwealth, which he discusses, but also for the wider British World.[33]

Commercial interests

In terms of British commercial interests overseas, in its recommendations the committee drew upon a long-standing sense of relative neglect among many expatriate communities. Specifically, it was felt that representatives of the Diplomatic and Consular Services regarded

[31] In March 1920, the Foreign Office supported Baden-Powell's request for special rates for scouts proceeding on exchange visits; TNA, FO 368/2234/947/187234, Charles Tufton to Under Secretary, Board of Education, 29 March 1920.

[32] T. H. Parsons, Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa (Ohio, 2004), p. 55. From 1920, Scout associations in independent countries were overseen by an International Bureau over which Baden-Powell, as chief scout, continued to exert influence.

[33] A. Warren, "Citizens of the Empire," in Mackenzie, Imperialism, p. 241.

commerce as beneath them; a perception which was fairly widespread at the time.[34] Consequently, it was either ignored or left to junior consular staff to deal with. In a number of communities, British chambers of commerce had emerged but official dealings with such bodies were typically uneasy. Suspicions remained of special pleading and that too often they were undemocratic and the mouthpiece of leading commercial expatriates.[35] Also, relatively few of these chambers were affiliated with the Association of Chambers of Commerce in the United Kingdom. Similarly, there were fundamental differences of opinion about the extent to which officials, and, where they existed, commercial attachés, should be proactive in obtaining commercial intelligence for British businesses wishing to enter foreign markets.[36] Disagreements also arose about official subventions to British chambers.[37] Yet, even before the committee met, the level of discontent in some communities had led to the establishment of merchant bodies, which might lobby government more effectively.[38] Discontent among British communities in South America, where there were several active and wealthy expatriate communities, had led to the despatch of Sir Maurice de Bunsen's Mission in 1918. Those communities feared competition from the United States especially after the war but in general the Foreign Office believed that they simply did not understand existing British commercial policy. Having considered the evidence the committee suggested that the commercial side of the Diplomatic and Consular Services should be developed, and that

[34] This was in spite of various committees which sought reform of the Consular Service in order to accentuate commercial matters; D. C. M. Platt, Cinderella Service: British Consuls Since 1825 (London, 1971), pp. 108-11.

[35] This was true, for example, of the Chambers in Constantinople in the early twentieth century, which was dominated by Sir William Whitthall.

[36] This attitude had been noted much earlier: F. V. Parsons, "The North-West African Company and the British Government, 1875-95," Historical Journal, i (1958), p. 153.

[37] See, for example, TNA, FO 368/1691/76674/120315, for discussions about official subsidies for the British Chambers in Argentina in 1917.

[38] This was true of the BMMA.

missions might be despatched to investigate foreign markets, in collaboration with trade associations. It also recommended that the British Government might facilitate but not finance touring exhibitions of British goods, and the provision of show rooms overseas for exhibitions of British goods. On the issue of British chambers of commerce the committee had some reservations and it refrained, as de Bunsen had done, from approving all of Follett Holt's recommendations relating to their mission to South America.[39] Chambers were an integral part of British trade overseas and the technical knowledge of such bodies, when communicated to consular officials, was held to be useful. The formation of new chambers was therefore seen to be a positive step. However, there were concerns that some foreign subjects were being admitted to membership of chambers, that not all chambers were run effectively or attained financial independence, and that in some cases certain commercial interests were excluded. Where these objections were overcome it was felt that chambers might by right have their views heard by the British representative and, should they wish, have these views forwarded by that representative to the British government. Such chambers would obtain a special charter of incorporation as an imperial chamber of commerce.[40]

The implementation of the committee's report

The recommendations of the committee were extremely wide ranging and in some respects, forward thinking. For example, it had recommended the use of film as a medium which

[39] British Diplomatic Mission to South America, 1918, Report by Follett Holt, M.Inst.C.E., The Commercial Member of the Mission, with preliminary note by the Rt. Hon. Sir Maurice de Bunsen, G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., C.B. (London, HMSO, 1919). Holt had suggested the nomination of five members from existing chambers to advise British Legations in South America.

[40] Discussion had arisen in Morocco and elsewhere of creating a "commercial arm" of the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas; British Library Newspaper Collections, Al-Moghreb Al-Aksa, the Tangier Chronicle and Morocco Gazette, 30 March 1916, "British Trade: 'After the War'".

"plays a world-wide part in moulding public opinion and spreading a true or false impression of a nation's industrial, social and political ideals".[41] Accordingly, it advised that the government should assist companies under British control to take a leading role in the film industry; advice which anticipated developments, several years later, in imperial cinematic propaganda besides the activities of the British Council.[42]

On the other hand, as the committee itself had acknowledged, the inherent individualism of the British people and their diversity made the idea even of limited government intervention difficult to contemplate. Indeed, a leading article in the weekly general interest newspaper Morocco praised the committee for its recommendations precisely because it had avoided being too prescriptive and because it did not envisage a far reaching and cumbersome administrative structure to implement its ideas.[43] Yet what it did suggest was impracticable. Tilley and his fellow committee members proposed a standing interdepartmental committee composed of representatives from the Foreign Office, including the Department of Trade, and the Board of Education and leading figures involved in British trade. A further executive committee, with similar representation to the standing committee, would also be created and

[41] The idea of using film for commercial propaganda was endorsed by the BMMA in its evidence to the Committee.

[42] See T. A. August, The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940 (Westport/London, 1985), pp. 101-5; R. Smyth, "The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927-1934, with special reference to East and Central Africa," Journal of African History, 20 (1979), pp. 437-50. Amery, as colonial secretary, was instrumental in initiating its application.

[43] The article commended the report for its "practical common sense and wise compromise". Its only reservation was that the committee had failed to point out that restrictions on the circulation of works in English was due to their price; something dictated by their over-elaborate binding and presentation; British Library Newspaper Collections, Morocco, 22 May 1920, "A Call to Arms".

would, in turn, evolve five sub-committees, each with a different geographical remit.[44] A sixth sub-committee would deal with issues bearing on the use of public funds. The existence of these bodies was felt likely to encourage the creation in each foreign country of a "central committee of British residents, qualified to represent the desires, ambitions and sentiments of the community in all matters affecting its welfare". Equally problematic was the idea of the establishment in some foreign countries of a single building which might accommodate the offices of the British consulate, a sample room of British products, a library of technical works, the offices of the British chamber of commerce, the rooms of the British society or club and offices of British firms. The difficulty of finding even basic and affordable accommodation was a recurring problem for consular and diplomatic staff.[45]

Efforts to implement the committee's findings encountered a more fundamental problem. On the general issue of state intervention in expatriate affairs the committee found a divergence of opinion.[46] According to the report of the committee, some witnesses had suggested that compulsory registration of British citizens tended to foster cohesiveness. Others, however, pointed to the "distinctive individualism of the British, their independence and dislike of state interference, or of control, in any shape or form". It was recognised that British communities varied considerably between countries and it would be impossible to devise rules that could

[44] These were South America, the Far East, Western Europe and Morocco, Turkey, the Levant and Egypt, and Central Europe and the Balkans. The sub-committees were to have one representative each from the relevant Foreign Office department as well as representatives from the relevant country or region and would interview representatives of British firms returning to Britain. They would also be able to call upon the technical knowledge of the Board of Education and Department of Overseas Trade.

[45] See, for example, regarding the situation in Buenos Aires in 1917, discussion at TNA, FO 371/2861/16830, and, with general reference to the Consular Service, Platt, Cinderella Service, pp. 28, 30, 37, 40, 84-86.

[46] Taylor, The Projection, p. 132.

apply to all of them. Having heard or read testimony from various witnesses, the committee adopted a cautious approach, recommending that official policy "should be ever watchful of the welfare of our foreign communities and helpful where help can legitimately be given and is acceptable". On the issue of the compulsory registration of British citizens, an area where interference might be detected, although the committee recognized that compulsion would facilitate the work of British consuls generally, including their implementation of the committee's proposals, it decided that it would prove to be deeply unpopular. Consequently it recommended simply a reinforcing of existing consular instructions and the extension of voluntary registration.[47]

The inherent diversity of expatriate communities and the difficulty of applying the committee's schemes across their entirety were borne out by the evidence of a key witness, Sir Charles Addis, the banker and financial expert.[48] After a long career in China and India, in 1918 Addis had become a Director of the Bank of England. He sat on a number of important government Committees including the Cunliffe Currency Committee, the Bank of England Committee of Treasury, and the India Currency Committee. He had been instrumental in establishing the Six Power Chinese Consortium and, until 1944, was British Censor of the State Bank of Morocco. His various appointments led him to travel quite widely among expatriate British communities.

[47] This was partly in view of ill-feeling arising from the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act (1914), which had effectively deprived children of second generation expatriates of their status as British subjects.

[48] Unless otherwise stated the remaining evidence on pages 19-20 is from School of Oriental and African Studies, London, Addis Papers, PPMS 14/38/390, "Memorandum of Evidence to be given before the Foreign Office Committee on British Communities Abroad, by Sir Charles Addis," 8 January 1920.

As Addis noted, the impulse among expatriates "to unite is quickened by the sense of exile and perhaps by a subconscious resistance to the ideals of an alien civilization". However, there was a notable tendency to exclude from this those British subjects who, for reasons of ethnicity, appeared not to exemplify Britishness. Furthermore, it was clear from Addis's evidence that it was almost impossible to generalize about the extent and manifestations of unity among disparate British communities; something that was in itself exemplified by his choice of Shanghai for illustrative purposes. The British community there, in his view, merited a clean bill of health according to the committee's criteria.[49] In Shanghai, as in many other British communities, British identity was reflected in common endeavour in the fields of commerce, charity, sport, education and cultural activities but, importantly, equally so by the existence of active patriotic societies for English, Scots, Irish and Welsh communities, each with their own newspapers. He concluded with the following perceptive observation:

> The peculiarities and conditions of life vary so greatly under the comprehensive word 'abroad' that it is doubtful if a common measure can be found for the 'definite scheme' suggested in the memorandum. There is so much already organized, and in working order that it would seem better to build up here and there on existing foundations rather than to start with any fresh scheme.
>
> The British public dislikes being drilled into anything, and most of all into its duty. Everyone except government officials knows that.

In Addis's opinion, if government funds existed for expenditure amongst British communities abroad, their distribution might be left either to the various consuls general, or, preferably, to a small itinerant committee.

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[49] On the British in Shanghai, see, especially, R. Bickers, "Shanghailanders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai, 1842-1937," Past & Present, 159 (1998), pp. 161-211.

Addis's views were in some degree borne out by the responses of individual British communities to the committee's report after its dissemination in June 1920. Admittedly, some of these responses suggested considerable enthusiasm for the report and its recommendations and, in several cases, indications that measures were already being instituted to implement its findings. When the Foreign Office circulated the committee's report to consular officials, it had highlighted the issue of registration of British subjects and the matter of patriotic societies as issues which did not require the immediate involvement of other government departments, and on which progress might therefore be made directly.

From the spring of 1921, favourable reports began to reach the Foreign Office. Among the 100 strong British community in New Caledonia, Consul Thomas Dunlop reported in June 1921 that the report had been regarded "as tangible evidence of the interest taken by H M Government in their welfare". As Dunlop noted, progress had already been made with regard to registration and, more especially, in the celebration of national festivals. At one of these celebrations, attended by twenty five British men, a committee was nominated to oversee the creation of a benevolent fund, the celebration of patriotic festivals, and the promotion of the study of English among children of the British community.[50]

Similar progress was reported from Marseilles where, according to Consul Edward Vicars, previous efforts to create a British club had met "shipwreck on the reef of finance". There, as in New Caledonia, a similar gender differential operated. Admission to the club was restricted to "practically every available male member of the British colony", "ladies not being for the present admitted, for want of space". Evidently, Vicars felt that the Club, if suitably

[50] TNA, FO 371/7003/115/W8531, Dunlop to Foreign Office, 11 June 1921.

encouraged, would in time be in a position to address the various matters raised in the committee's report.[51]

In October 1921, Consul-General Godfrey Hertslet reported from Trieste on a meeting of British residents to form an "Association of British Residents". The meeting had endorsed a set of rules and statutes for the association and had agreed initially to support a fund for deserving cases, the British Seamen's Home, church and cemetery. Eventually it was hoped to provide for the education of the children of British subjects and for the celebration of patriotic and other special occasions.[52]

More generally, however, there was evidence that the committee's ill-defined remit had led to confusion. Among the British community in Ghent, Vice-Consul John Mitcheson reported the establishment of a club with political, commercial and social purposes. Mitcheson noted that, besides the pursuit of British commercial interests, he aspired to the greater interaction of Britons and Belgians, and, by inference, efforts to contain the propagandising efforts of rival nations. He explained the rationale for such activities by way of a long exposition on the commercial and trading strengths of the city. In Mitcheson's view conditions were ripe to promote Ghent as a centre of British influence.[53]

Progress on the key commercial aspects of the report was in fact delayed pending a conference of representatives of British chambers in foreign countries which was to discuss the report of the committee and the principles upon which British chambers should be established overseas.[54] When that meeting took place in April 1921, the report was

[51] Ibid. Vicars to Curzon, 17 May 1921, W5527.

[52] Ibid. Hertslet to Curzon, 14 October 1921, W11174.

[53] Ibid. Mitcheson to Gurney, 20 July 1921, in Gurney to Foreign Office, W8040.

[54] Ibid. Minute by Codrington, 11 May 1921, W5113.

enthusiastically endorsed and it was agreed that control of British chambers should be placed firmly in British hands. Whereas restricted or associate membership might be afforded to foreign representatives of British firms or to foreign nationals who traded with Britain, full membership and office holding was reserved for British subjects. The meeting also suggested that with the approval of the Board of Trade, chambers be permitted to call themselves "British Empire Chambers". Yet, in most expatriate communities of any size there were, generally speaking, seen to be more fundamental problems which could not be addressed by diktat. Indeed, a range of issues revolving around the official projection of British commercial interests overseas had been simmering among many expatriate communities for many years and even the attempted wholesale reform of the commercial attaché service in the early 1920s failed to assuage these concerns. It certainly did not clarify oversight of overseas commerce by government.[55]

In fact, for all sorts of reasons, the committee's recommendations were destined not to be acted upon. Whilst some of its provisions were farsighted and sensible its timing was unfortunate and the Treasury's opposition was inevitable. The committee had begun badly when a decision upon its membership and the nomination and contacting of witnesses was delayed. Furthermore, its broad remit required significant efforts to gather vast amounts of information on many different subjects; something which inevitably led to delays. Curzon, as foreign secretary, was apparently keen to implement the committee's report but was undoubtedly constrained by many competing and more important demands on his time. Indeed, in the autumn of 1920, having been given the papers he kept them for several months; leading some officials to believe that they had been lost. However, even if circumstances had allowed prompt action by Curzon, the cabinet was apparently unwilling to consider the report until the Paris Peace Conference had concluded. Therefore, although the Foreign Office took

[55] E. Maisel, The Foreign Office and British Foreign Policy (Brighton, 1994), pp. 189-99.

initial steps on some matters for which sanction from the Treasury or from other departments was deemed unnecessary, other areas of the report were postponed.

Curzon's interest in the committee, and his determination to resist Treasury constraints, was reflected in his efforts in the field of educational provision; the lynchpin of the scheme to his mind.[56] Curzon argued that a refusal to support educational initiatives would inevitably lead to attacks in parliament and the press. Although retrenchment clearly could not be ignored Curzon felt that alone it was insufficient justification for the treasury's position. To reinforce the point he quoted from a further memorandum which he had previously circulated to the cabinet in February 1921, which outlined French spending on such matters. As he noted the Chamber of Deputies had recently voted twenty six million francs in order to "re-establish her [France's] overseas trade and increase her political prestige in foreign countries".[57] Here was the rub. The British empire might have attained its greatest physical extent at the war's end but, as Curzon well knew, the threats to its existence had multiplied. French temerity could not be left unchallenged.[58]

Curzon's concern about educational provision and the sense of lagging behind rival European powers was endorsed by some consular officials. In October 1920, Hugh Gaisford of the British Legation in Guatemala reported that he expected a branch of the Overseas Club or Royal Colonial Institute to open there shortly. Its first aim would be to establish a British school in the country. According to Gaisford the destruction by an earthquake of the only English school had given German and French initiatives free scope. The only efficient school

[56] In 1919, he had approached Herbert Fisher, President of the Board of Education, to chair the Committee. Fisher declined but gave evidence.

[57] TNA, [Cabinet Office Papers] CAB 24/119/CP2569 "Memorandum", Curzon, 9 February 1921; "Memorandum on French Policy with Regard to Propaganda in Foreign Countries".

[58] In December 1918, Curzon stated that "France was the great Power from whom we may have most to fear in the future"; TNA, CAB 27/24, minutes of the Eastern Committee, 2 December 1918.

was German and, as Gaisford noted, the Alliance Française, supported by the French Government had begun efforts to establish a school in order to combat German influence. French pedagogy did not appeal to British parents and many Guatemalan parents had educated their children in the United States; apparently with indifferent results. According to Gaisford, if a society were to be formed then the degree of support for an English school among its members would be considerably increased if official financial help were available.[59] Similar concerns had been aired by William Codrington earlier in 1920 regarding the efforts of the Anglo-South American Education Committee. To Codrington the question was whether or not the British communities in South America, which in some cases had organized themselves effectively for the war, were to be kept "as active agents of national expansion" or whether they should be permitted "to sink back into indifference with the result that thousands of British children will grow up as foreigners".[60] A similar situation existed in Morocco. There, the British Morocco Merchants Association had asked government to match the sum raised through subscriptions pound for pound. The attitude of the Treasury had smothered the initiative.[61]

On the wider issue of inculcating patriotic values, Britain also seemed to be inferior to France. Whereas French patriotic interests were sustained in a co-ordinated fashion by the Union des Grandes Associations Françaises, in Britain's case several associations vied for the allegiance of expatriates, notably the Royal Colonial Institute, the League of Empire, the Victoria League, the Overseas Club, and The Patriotic League of Britons Overseas. Admittedly, when the latter two amalgamated in 1918, they were more proactive than their rivals in seeking

[59] TNA, FO 371/4480/A8567, Gaisford to Curzon, 30 October 1920. According to Gaisford, the efforts of his predecessor, Sir Charles Young, to initiate British educational provision in Guatemala with official support had gone unheeded.

[60] TNA, FO 368/2234/947/209459, minute by Codrington, 30 July 1920.

[61] Ibid. Minute by Codrington, 27 August 1920.

official sanction for their activities, but since they were essentially private organisations foreign office officials felt unable to favour one over the other, and to give one or other official endorsement, beyond facilitating, through consular and diplomatic staff, their establishment.[62] There was, also, a sense that a good deal of what the committee recommended was already being done in one form or another, albeit without uniformity within the Outer Empire, by these bodies. This was particularly true of the Overseas Club and Patriotic League. When welcoming the appointment of the committee in a leader in January 1920, The Times had bemoaned the lack of collective effort among British communities in foreign countries during the war; a situation which contrasted unfavourably with that of Germany.[63] Evelyn Wrench rebutted these accusations on the following day, recounting the evolution and activities of the Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, and the Overseas Club, as well as their merging in 1918, and their cooperation with the League of Empire.[64]

In fairness to Wrench, the record of these bodies was impressive. Soon after its formation in 1910, the Overseas Club was engaged in a wide range of activities through more than five hundred branches world-wide. Among these activities was the establishment of the Boy Scouts and of Rifle Associations, recruiting for the local militia, instituting debating and social clubs, providing public libraries and holding patriotic concerts. Its membership, which soared to over one hundred and eighty thousand during the war, was encouraged to mark patriotic occasions, including Trafalgar Day, Empire Day, and St George's Day, as well as other national holidays. All of these activities were encouraged through the club's magazine, Overseas, which by 1920 had a circulation of twenty two thousand subscribers.[65] It benefitted

[62] See correspondence at TNA FO 371/7003/115/W951/W1249. Such assistance was not without problems. Establishment of branches in Russia was illegal.

[63] The Times, 28 January 1920, p. 13.

[64] The Times, 29 January 1920, p. 8.

[65] British Library, Northcliffe Papers, Add. Ms. 62222, draft article for Overseas, n.d. but 1912. Northcliffe was the Club's president and, besides financial sponsorship, he placed at its disposal the

from the support and membership of leading figures such as the Lords Kitchener and Baden-Powell; in 1918, the latter described the club as the elder brother of the Scouts.[66] After the war, when many other areas of war-related voluntary activities were run down, such as comfort funds for troops and the raising of funds for munitions, these activities became prominent again. And yet, whilst, as previously noted, the Overseas Club successfully amalgamated with the Patriotic League of Britons, discussions for union with the Royal Colonial Institute, with whom they shared many members and office holders, failed.[67] The activities of both of these bodies, though closely related, not only to each other, but also to the work of the committee, continued without official oversight and without uniformity. Furthermore, the real strongholds of the Overseas Club and Patriotic League Overseas, as well as the Royal Colonial Institute were in the Dominions, and the committee, though intending on its inception to include the formal empire within its purview, subsequently decided to limit itself to expatriate communities in foreign countries. Though sensible and necessary, this meant that its report did not gain from the direct input and support of Milner or Amery, or their officials, at the Colonial Office.[68] In addition, there is a sense that after the war, whilst many perceived scope for the more efficient development of empire, the

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overseas Daily Mail. He also headed official propaganda in foreign countries from February to November 1918. The Royal Colonial Institute had also been active during the war, although its membership was considerably smaller than that of the Overseas Club: T. R. Reese, The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society 1868-1968 (London, etc., 1968), pp. 110-125, 134.

[66] As he noted, both were conceived at about the same time, they were of roughly equal numerical strength, and they shared much the same ideal and sympathies; Wrench, Struggle, p. 97.

[67] British Library, Northcliffe Papers, Add. Ms. 62223, Report of the Joint Committee of the Royal Colonial Institute and the Over-Seas Club and Patriotic League of Britons Overseas, confidential. For a discussion of these efforts, see Reese, History, pp. 150-152.

[68] Although both men were apparently shown the report, I have found no evidence that they commented on it; TNA, CO 723/323/830/78/22138, Gilbert Grindle, colonial office, to foreign office, draft, 11 May 1920.

contribution to be made by expatriate communities, now that the national emergency had passed, was less clear.

Similarly, when it came to broader efforts to stimulate cultural interchange and understanding, the work of the committee was hamstrung by retrenchment. Symptomatic of this was the cessation of foreign office funding for the British Institute in Florence in 1921. The evidence provided to the committee by leading figures from the Institute and from the Anglo-Italian League had pointed to a vibrant centre of cultural activity. With its reading rooms, library, lecture programme, and wider outreach to the expatriate community, it exemplified the committee's stated aims. In an appeal to new members in 1920, the Director of the Institute, Alfred Spender, noted that the Institute was 'a little corner of England in Italy' where a deeper knowledge of England and Italy might be imparted to British and Italian citizens. He appealed directly to English-speaking residents in Florence to become members and to encourage friends who visited the city to become temporary members.[69] More specifically, the Institute provided tuition in the English language and in a range of other subjects; notably, English music, art, literature, drama, and architecture.[70] Students were enrolled either on a five or six year degree course which aimed to produce English teachers for Italian public schools or a shorter course which focused purely on the English language. At a less elevated level, instruction was offered in the form of free courses on various subjects including the British colonies and dominions. The Institute attracted students from across Italy, as well as members of the expatriate Anglo-American colony, diplomats, such as Rennell Rodd, and many prominent Italian and British scholars and politicians. They, as well

[69] British Institute of Florence, BRI:I:D:130:f7: 'The British Institute of Florence – Via Dei Conti, 3', A F Spender, Oct. 1920. I am most grateful to Alyson Price, Archivist at the British Institute for supplying me with copies of this and other material relating to the Institute.

[70] BRI:I:D:130:ffI-2, 'Work done at the British Institute at Florence During the Winter of 1919-1920', n.d.

as the one hundred and fifty students studying for the degree, would disseminate British values and culture throughout the country.

However, the institute had been founded in 1917 with financial support from the Department of Information, which had since closed. Its purpose in this context, as an instrument of cultural propaganda, had by 1921 if not before come to resemble too closely those activities of the Foreign Office News Department which were deemed superfluous.[71] For that reason, the initiative of Harold Goad, of London University, whose evidence to the committee supported the establishment of a British equivalent to the *Alliance Française*, also failed to find official favour.[72]

The implementation of the committee's report met with other difficulties. Its recommendations were so wide ranging that inevitably in certain areas they conflicted with existing policy. This was true, for example, with regard to the maintenance of overseas chaplaincies. For some time the Foreign Office had systematically reduced such commitments and by 1921 only two churches, that in Alexandria, effectively a seamen's mission church,

[71] This was in spite of the continuance of the French Institute at and the anticipated revival of the German Institute; BRI:I:D:130:ff3-4: 'Translation of Prof. [Guido] Ferrando's Memorandum', October 1920. Ferrando was the first head of the school at the Institute.

[72] Goad was closely connected with the Institute of Florence, and later became its director. He apparently spoke to the committee about the Near East, having served as a Greek interpreter in Salonika and as British liaison officer with the Italian army in the Balkans. Goad hoped to create a network of institutes or societies in foreign countries, which would liaise with English schools, and promote the English language and British cultural values. He also hoped to forge connections with the Dominions, and, through the English Speaking Union, with the United States. Central to his aim was a belief that if disseminated widely, British values would foster the general welfare of mankind; BRI:I:A:IV:I;ff6-9, 'Scheme to establish a National Society on the lines of the Alliance Française, by H E Goad, 1920'.

and the Episcopal Church in Montevideo, continued to receive official subsidies.[73] The request, in February 1921, of Robert Michell, British Consul in Montevideo, to make the annual payment of £100 to the British Episcopal Church there caused division within the Foreign Office. Some officials argued that it would be difficult to continue such a grant when similar congregations elsewhere were denied official payments.[74] Against this, William Codrington pointed out that the economy would be relatively small and that the report of the committee, which had been sent to Montevideo as well as to other consular posts, had suggested that provision be made in this area. Indeed, as Codrington noted, the British community there had taken a particular interest in the committee's investigations. Suppression of the grant would provoke criticism in the House of Commons among the committee's supporters. To Gerald Villiers's view that British churches and chaplains provided a focus and rallying point for British communities, and that any reduction in remaining grants must be referred to Curzon, Leslie Sherwood argued that the committee's advice completely reversed existing policy. Consequently, in order to deflect the attentions of the Audit Office, the matter would have to be referred to the Treasury for its approval.[75] After some delay, however, and possibly on account of the rebuff received from the Treasury to other aspects of the report, it was decided that the Treasury would not conceivably sanction a general subsidizing of overseas chaplaincies. The church at Montevideo retained its subsidy but only for a strictly limited period.

More problematic still was the registering of British subjects. Though it was a core duty of consular staff, for a variety of reasons registration practices varied considerably. It was undoubtedly a complicated issue and surviving foreign office minutes suggest that in

[73] TNA, FO 369/1762/246/K4457/4457, minute by Edward Parkes, 6 May 1921, "British Government Grant to the British Church at Montevideo".

[74] Ibid. Minute by Leslie Sherwood, 15 April 1921.

[75] Ibid. Minutes by Codrington & Villiers, 21 April, and Sherwood, 26 April, 1921.

broaching the issue officials realized that they had opened a Pandora's box. This was especially so as when making its recommendations, the committee had in mind not only permanent residents overseas but also British subjects who might travel around or through foreign countries on business. Initially, at least, and until its impossibility became apparent, it also wished to include those individuals who visited foreign countries for a shorter period. Some useful initiatives were suggested by consular staff including the use of colour coded cards for different categories of British subjects; an idea which was greeted enthusiastically and adapted for their use by other consular posts.[76] Similarly, Consul Frank Savery in Warsaw, writing in September 1920 in connection with visitors to his and other consular districts, and unaware that the idea had already been taken up at the Foreign Office, suggested the insertion of a slip in passports advising the bearer to register at the nearest British consulate.[77] Rapidly, however, the complexity of the issue and the extent of divergence in local practices became clear.

In Panama and neighbouring districts there was a substantial population of black West African British subjects, very few of whom were registered. Consul Constantine Graham, whose district was Panama City, was distinctly unenthusiastic about remedying this. As he pointed out in August 1920 the creation of a list would involve a huge additional burden of work and such a list would quickly become redundant as the population was migratory. As no funds were available for relief work, which might lead to contact with the people, and as no patriotic bodies, which might lead such work had shown any interest in Panama, little could be done.[78]

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[76] TNA, FO 371/5470/W30/30/50, Arthur Abbott to Curzon, 25 August 1920.

[77] Ibid. Savery to Curzon, 14 September 1920, W126/30/50.

[78] Ibid. Graham to Curzon, 30 August 1920, FO W290/30. The existence of such concerns at the Foreign Office also became apparent in connection with the Foreign Office reforms; Steiner and Dockrill, "The Foreign Office," p. 140.

Discussions soon ranged far beyond the core issue of encouraging solidarity and national feelings among British subjects. Inevitably, concerns emerged in several British communities that registration was a precursor to taxation; a concern which proved difficult to allay. Similarly, various difficulties came to light in terms of existing practices; among them, whether or not registration should be annual and whether or not registration certificates should carry a photograph of the bearer. While these matters seemed remote from the committee's purpose, having identified problems in existing procedures it became necessary to discuss them within the Foreign Office, with consular staff and, where necessary, with other government departments. Besides the issue of security, discussion also arose on the many categories of British subjects to be registered and whether or not they should include individuals naturalized in the United Kingdom as well as overseas. No department within the Foreign Office was prepared to accept responsibility for the issue until on Tilley's intervention in November 1920 the Treaty Department conceded that a far simpler initiative would be to gradually replace registration certificates with passports.[79]

Within the Foreign Office, officials who had participated in the committee's business remained loyal, but their enthusiasm was not shared by others with greater appreciation of retrenchment. Sir Eyre Crowe, an assistant under-secretary of state, was a notable sceptic. When William Codrington outlined the proposed standing committee it was an extraordinarily cumbersome body with, as Crowe inferred, imprecise functions, and an ill-defined field of activity, no powers or resources and with a rather elusive purpose of assuaging the feelings of neglect among Britons overseas.[80] On the issue of maintaining links between the home government and British business interests, as Crowe suggested, this was the function of the

[79] Ibid. Minute by Tilley, 25 November 1920, and other correspondence and minutes, W1903/30.

[80] FO 371/5470/W2755/30/50, memorandum by Codrington, 2 December 1920. Codrington's scheme resembled Tilley's (see pp. 17-18) but made clearer provision for liaison with expatriate communities.

Department of Trade and it seemed to him pointless to create yet another committee to deal with it.[81]

Consular officers had also criticized the committee. Arthur Abbott in San Paulo noted that if another committee were established then alternative representatives from within the community should be identified. In his view previous witnesses had either lacked knowledge of crucial facets of the British community and/or were unpopular and had attained their nomination by pushing themselves forward when there was a lack of other obvious candidates.[82] In response Codrington could only note the delays at the committee's inception. When, eventually, the committee had met there was little time in which to identify witnesses and the priority had been to avoid criticism that important British communities overseas had been overlooked.[83]

The lingering demise of the committee and of its report was peculiar if predictable. Though championed by several energetic and able foreign office officials, by the conservative press and, apparently, by important sections of British public opinion, by significant business and educational interests in the United Kingdom and overseas, as well as by a forceful and outspoken foreign secretary, in the summer of 1921 it sank without trace. When, eventually, after a long hiatus Curzon had raised the matter at cabinet in June 1921, the favourable reception of the report was noted whereas the Treasury's objection was not. By that point, the issue was the creation of a standing committee, on which the Treasury would be represented and the availability of a budget of about one hundred thousand pounds per annum "for a term of years". As the cabinet minutes record this was seen to be a very small amount "and in

[81] Ibid. Minute by Crowe, 5 December 1920.

[82] Ibid. Abbott to Curzon, 25 August 1920, 30/W30.

[83] Ibid. Minute by Codrington, 25 October 1920.

marked contrast to the very large grants voted by the French and German Governments".[84] The Cabinet agreed to refer the matter to the Finance Committee. On several occasions thereafter foreign office officials considered raising the issue, only to conclude that circumstances were not propitious. And yet, nothing was said of the committee until July 1938, when an unknown Foreign Office official noted for the record that no further references to it or its work, besides the cabinet discussion in June 1921, could be found among the Cabinet Office records.[85]

In explaining the neglect of the committee's recommendations it is also notable that in 1921 their most ardent supporters had been posted overseas; Tilley to Brazil and Codrington to Morocco. Curzon was undoubtedly keen on the principle behind the report and his tardy tabling of it at cabinet might suggest that he did not wish to see it rejected on account of straightened financial circumstances.[86] There was, also, the pressure of more important business; a factor which undoubtedly affected reactions to it, as well as its implementation by British representatives overseas. For example, although Arnold Robertson, Consul-General in Tangier 1921-4, in the summer of 1922, established a committee to represent British interests there, his time and energy were mostly spent considering the future of Tangier. An alternative explanation for Curzon's apparent prevarication, and an idea suggested by the reasoning of his officials, was that public pressure should be allowed to take effect and that a popular upsurge should be allowed to overcome Treasury opposition.[87] When the committee's report was published, it had been greeted with considerable, if not unqualified, praise by the conservative press to the extent that The Times had offered to circulate ten thousand copies in

[84] TNA, CAB 23/26, 49 (21), Cabinet Conclusions, 14 June 1921.

[85] TNA, FO 371/7003/W2686/115/50, Minute of 7 July 1938.

[86] For the Treasury's recalcitrance over reform of the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service: Steiner and Dockrill, "The Foreign Office," p. 147.

[87] TNA, FO 368/2234/209459, see minute by Charles Tufton, 30 July 1920.

its overseas editions; a suggestion which the Treasury also quashed.[88] There was also a sense in which, from an imperial perspective, the committee was redundant in the early 1920s when more radical manifestations of imperialism became unfashionable.[89]

As for inter-war constructive imperialism, as previously noted the committees' focus was confluent with it, but importantly was not of it. Constructive imperialism was principally geared to developing links between the mother country and the empire proper. In economic terms and with reference to issues bearing on reconstruction, the formal empire and in particular its white settler communities apparently had more to offer than scattered expatriate British communities in foreign countries.[90] Initiatives such as the Oversea Settlement Committee had broad departmental representation and broader official support than the Committee on British Communities Abroad.[91] Furthermore, in the midst of the post-war crisis, economic issues, including the settlement of ex-servicemen, had greater immediacy. Some of the evidence submitted to the committee had touched upon wider concerns about Britain's overseas commerce but often it suggested special pleading. White settler communities in the formal empire were more in keeping with notions of a 'Greater Britain' which had taken root in the late nineteenth century and which resurfaced after the First World

[88] See correspondence at TNA FO 368/2234/947/201623/202238. Of the few substantive criticisms made, The Near East bemoaned the absence in the report of arrangements for the interchange of undergraduates between universities in different countries; The Near East, 3 June 1920, p. 795. Robert Young, editor of the Japan Chronicle, who had appeared before the committee, accused the government of attempting to bureaucratize British communities abroad; TNA, FO 368/2234/947/211086, Japan Chronicle, 30 June 1920.

[89] B. Porter, The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 3rd edition (Harlow, 1996), pp. 288-92.

[90] S. Constantine, 'Empire Migration and Imperial Harmony' in S. Constantine (ed), Emigrants and empire:British settlement in the Dominions between the wars (Manchester, 1990), p. 7.

[91] Ibid. Constantine, 'Empire Migration', pp. 3-4.

War.[92] The earlier inclusion by Milner and Amery of expatriate communities in a broader 'outer empire' appeared to fade. The efforts of Amery and of Milner were increasingly occupied by initiatives within the empire proper. For Milner, writing in November 1919, advancing the development of the 'dependent empire' was the only thing that kept him in government.[93] Indeed, Amery even drew a distinction between 'oversea settlement', that is the movement of Britons within the empire, and 'emigration' to foreign countries, 'with its implied suggestion of…loss'.[94] Amery made a clear link between emigration initiatives and solving the immediate domestic problem of unemployment, including concerns about violent unrest.

In explaining why the committee's recommendations were not acted upon, on the issue of emigration to the colonies the Royal Colonial Institute, which of the patriotic organizations was the most actively involved in this area, had found a post-war role which harmonized, albeit temporarily and sometimes uneasily, with official policy.[95] The work of the other patriotic bodies which had been central to the committee's work was more peripheral with regard to the development of formal empire.

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[92] K. Williams, '"A way out of our troubles": the politics of empire settlement 1900-1922', in Constantine, Emigrants and empire, p. 25. On the idea of a greater Britain, see D. Bell, The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the future of World Order, 1860-1900 (Princeton/Oxford, 2007).

[93] S. Constantine, The Making, p. 44.

[94] Ibid.

[95] On Amery and unemployment, see Williams, 'A way out of', pp. 36, 41, and K. Fedorowich, 'The Assisted emigration of British ex-servicemen to the dominions, 1914-1922', in Constantine, Emigrants and empire, pp. 55-6. On the efforts of the RCI, see Williams, pp. 30-35, and K. Fedorowich, Unfit for heroes: Reconstruction and soldier settlement in the empire between the wars (Manchester, 1995), pp. 26-30, 53-9, 197-8.

As Stephen Constantine has noted, the war had highlighted the potential of empire but had prevented its realization in terms of any official oversight from London. After the war, Amery and others pursued ideas of autarkic empire with renewed vigour, if limited success.[96] These efforts drew upon a range of war-time governmental and unofficial initiatives which were more wide-ranging than any associated with expatriate communities. As such, and although some of the colonial development plans of Milner and Amery, such as the Colonial Development Committee, suffered 'a quiet demise', there were precious few alternative policies to follow. Opposition from Colonial Office officials and from the Treasury especially, limited their impact, but they were a less obvious target for financial cuts than an initiative aimed purely at consolidating expatriate communities.[97] The latter, as suggested by the evidence of Sir Charles Addis, were inherently different in character. Many such communities espoused patriotic sentiments after the war but for central government this was increasingly less of a priority than more pressing matters of reconstruction and the resettlement of returning soldiers. As the focus of official efforts moved, and as the tide of war-time patriotic sentiment receded, the committee's recommendations appeared somewhat peripheral if not ephemeral and therefore expendable.

Quite simply, however, the committee's brief was too broad and ill-defined. Its function was undoubtedly propagandistic, something recognized unequivocally by Curzon, in his disparaging comparisons of the dissemination of British values and ideas compared with those of France. Partly for this reason it became a sitting duck to the Treasury. When in May 1919 discussion occurred about the budget of the Foreign Office News Department, its "miscellaneous expenditures"; namely, those activities which closely resembled the ideas in

[96] Constantine, The Making, pp. 30-31, 34.

[97] Ibid. pp. 30-61.

Tilley's report, were quickly axed.[98] A considerably smaller news department remained central to post-war foreign propaganda yet its staff had little involvement with Tilley's committee. Indeed, exactly a year before Curzon despatched copies of its report to consular posts, he had already circulated instructions for the dissemination of foreign propaganda in peace time. To the extent that, as Curzon urged, British subjects overseas might facilitate such propaganda there was a clear overlap with the work of the committee. Nothing was said of the manner in which Tilley's other recommendations should dovetail with post-war policy on foreign propaganda.

With the temporary eclipse of the German threat, the function of the committee on British Communities Abroad slewed towards assuaging a sense of neglect among expatriates. In the context of retrenchment and a greater focus on the more efficient management of the empire proper this was significant. The decision, warmly applauded by the Treasury, to farm out specific recommendations of the committee to other departments for action, among them commercial propaganda, ham-strung the committee as long as no standing, coordinating, body existed. This delegation was in part recognition of the scope of the committee's recommendations and a lack of foresight and understanding on the part of its detractors. Furthermore, as Eyre Crowe's interventions suggest, it was also a reflection of the disarray in the Foreign Office soon after war, in the van of significant and unsatisfactory reform, and a disinclination to add to the administrative burden. Attention was quickly diverted away from the committee's preoccupations by other matters. Ironically, several years later, and in rather different circumstances, when the fascist threat and economic nationalism had emerged, and

[98] Taylor, The Projection, p. 54. Stephen Gaselee of the News Department noted that the Treasury had informed his department that it did not exist to spread British culture overseas: TNA, FO 368/2233/69907, minute by Gaselee, 26 May 1919. These economies were echoed from the late 1940s in cutbacks to Britain's external broadcasting and funding of the British Council; A. Adamthwaite, "Suez Revisited," International Affairs, 64 (1988), pp. 449-64.

when the cultural propaganda of rival powers appeared to outstrip that of Britain, a very similar body emerged, the Cultural Relations Committee, later renamed the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries. Its activities, which encompassed the promotion overseas of the English language, as well as literature, science, art, music, and education, in turn spawned the British Council, and, more by coincidence than by design breathed life into the aims of the Committee on British Communities Abroad.[99]

[99] Taylor, The Projection, pp. 142-52. The activities of these committees, which were to include the Dominions in their work, may be followed in FO 395/505 and FO 395/528.