

Southeast Asia—Our Move



The American attitude toward imperialism and colonialism has been characteristic of most American attitudes to the external world. Its simple-minded self-satisfaction is summed

up in the incident of the clubwoman who rose, bristling with indignation, to ask a British lecturer what he had to say about "the two centuries of ill-treatment which the Indians had received." "Madam," the lecturer replied mildly, "as a guest in your country I can hardly allow myself to comment upon that."

We are anti-imperialist because we were ourselves once a colony, because we have sent more missionaries than traders to heathen parts, because we did our land-grabbing and colonizing on our own continent, and because our overseas "possessions" were never an important element in our economy. Yet we have gradually become aware that buffers and outposts are essential to our national interests—whence the Monroe Doctrine, the Open Door policy in China, and our acquisition of Pacific islands—to mention only those. Now that we have become a first-class power—and now that no balance of smaller powers, in the European style of the last three centuries is feasible—we have had to invent instruments of security hitherto unknown. In Europe and the Mediterranean East we have embarked upon a policy of Russian containment and are carrying it out with the aid of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic Pact and armament protocol. In the Far East we—but at this point our fluency deserts us; we are brought up with a jerk and are forced to ask ourselves, "Well, what about the Far East? What *are* we up to there?"

The answer to that question will presumably come as answers to similar questions have come in the past—when the Administration is driven by the sudden challenge of events into taking a clear position and making that position plain to the world. A bystander may meanwhile remark that China is not the whole of the East, and he may even draw this rough analogy: If Communist China is the "Russia" of the new Asia, and India is its "western Europe," then there dangles below China a counterpart to the Balkans in the region known as Southeast Asia. While India is thought of as safely neutral (at the worst) and China is the subject of grave concern, the six disparate lands of Southeast Asia—Burma, Thailand, Indo-China, Malaya, The United States of Indonesia, and the Philippine Republic—cannot be allowed to slip out of mind. If they were to drop into the gaping Communist maw, significant resources would come into the hands of our ideological enemies: both the Antipodes and our own Pacific outposts would be directly threatened; we at home would experience the discomfort of devoting to armament an even larger share of our national product than now, with such unwelcome social changes as that might bring about. Other more problematical results could be cited, but on this calculation alone Southeast Asia becomes an Oriental equivalent of Greece and Turkey, another crucial point of Communist containment.

Must the groaning taxpayer assume still another burden abroad? Only in a manner of speaking. The position is not so menacing as to suggest the fantasy of arming millions of these Asiatics, nor is their economy the kind to which a Marshall Plan could be applied.

We are here in a strictly colonial region whose leaders are "anti-capitalist"—especially in the sense of anti-

imperialist—and have repeatedly fomented revolt against European rule; but none of those leaders, not even Ho Chimin of Indo-China, who was trained in Russia, has shown himself subservient either to Moscow or to the new and prodigiously ambitious strong man of the East, Mao Tse-tung. It is satisfactory to read that at the recent Peking "trade union" meeting of Asiatic Communists, Nehru of India, Thakin Nu of Burma, and Soekarno of Indonesia were denounced as capitalist beasts, while the Dutch-Indonesian settlement had the honor of excoriation from the Ukrainian delegate to the United Nations on December 12. We may hope that an equally reasonable settlement will be reached between the French and those Indo-Chinese represented by Bao Dai, who, in spite of what the Communists may say, is a nationalist, not a mere puppet.

The People's Party in Thailand is not Communist; its aim is radical agrarian reform and the elimination of the Chinese middle-men who control the essential rice trade. In Malaya, a British protectorate, the position is more complex. There is the classic rebellion against the Europeans who own the tin mines and rubber plantations, but there is also racial conflict between the native Malaysians, who constitute a minority in their own land (forty-two per cent), immigrant Chinese about equal in number, and Tamils from India, who make up fourteen per cent of the peninsula's population. This is obvious breeding ground for Communist agitation, but so far there hasn't seemed to be any highly organized action.

The Filipinos may be said to be the only people in the East who believe profoundly and instinctively in democratic institutions, although the sugar workers in particular have been victimized as outrageously as any of the Southeast Asiatics. Here, fifty years of

American education have been effective.

With all this, however, there remains a Southeast Asia problem; and if, as has already been said, it is not a problem to be solved by an arms pact or the Marshall Plan, it is one to be dealt with by means of another instrument designed in Washington—Point Four.

The essentials of the problem have been surveyed in *Agrarian Unrest in Southeast Asia* (Columbia University Press, \$4) by Erich H. Jacoby, who spent four years in the Philippines and taught at Adamson University in Manila. Mr. Jacoby is primarily concerned not with politics but with the realities which account for politics. In this part of the world, they are land tenure, rural debt, and population pressure. Mr. Jacoby has brought together a mass of data so detailed that his story can be told only by way of suggestive samplings. On population pressure and the food supply, he is almost consoling. It would appear that only in Java has the Malthusian danger-line been reached.

There is great overcrowding in Tonkin (Indo-China), and the peasants strongly resist the notion of leaving the place where their ancestors are buried, even for better farms; but Thailand is underpopulated, there is no pressure in Malaya, there has never been a food shortage in Burma; and in all three countries vast tracts of arable land are still available for cultivation. What is more serious is the present need for greater diversity of crops almost everywhere, and particularly in the rice-producing areas, where, because only one crop is planted, millions of men are idle four months or more out of the year.

Credit has been the keenest problem ever since the Europeans introduced a money economy and allowed Chinese middlemen and Indian moneylenders to operate where only government lending institutions should have been permitted. Such institutions do indeed exist. But in Malaya they were provided "with by-laws rather than with funds"; in Indo-China they lent only to the big landowners on favorable terms, and left the peasants to the moneylenders; in Burma they loaned an average of only two million rupees a year from 1919 to 1939 as against five hundred million extended by the Indian bankers at sixteen to thirty-five

per cent (on three-year mortgages), while "outside lenders" furnished small loans in uncalculated amounts at seven to fifteen per cent per month.

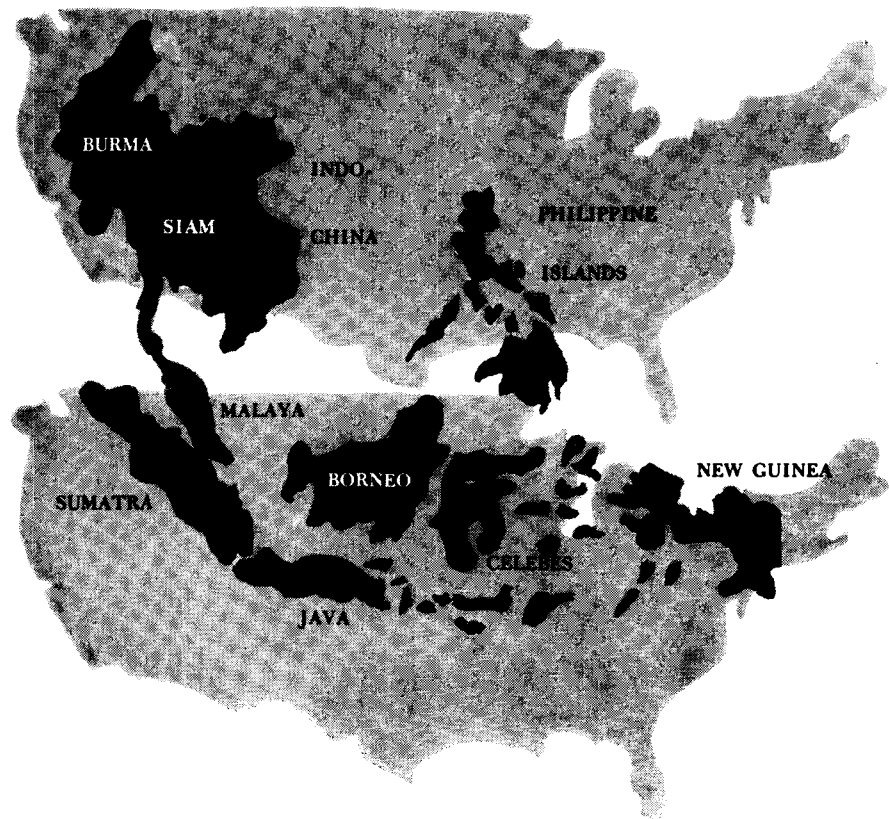
Small wonder that in one Tonkinese district 252 persons owned as much land as 122,000 others, that in Lower Burma half the rice lands were owned by "nonagriculturists." Most people in this part of the world are sharecroppers, working land which is only nominally their own and actually the moneylender's, and casual laborers. In Lower Burma, for example, there are many migrating tenants, homeless and even villageless, and therefore cut off from all social codes and moral restraint. The incidence of crime is as high in Lower Burma as anywhere in the world, but violence is rare in Upper Burma—and in the Shan States of Malaya, in Cambodia, in the "outer islands" of Indonesia, in Thailand, and wherever the European planter and Asiatic moneylender have not been.

This is what happens when employers are not "interested in a stable labor force." It is this that explains a "permanent political unrest and . . . the existence of an agricultural proletari-

at" in Indo-China. The problem is not merely one of restoring stolen lands to their owners, and of creating landowners who, since their livelihood will come from the land, and not from loans, will tend that land as it should be tended. The problem is to rebuild a series of societies that do not depart too far from the traditions of the men who constitute these societies.

Southeast Asia is very obviously participating, through its leaders, in the universal social mutation (if that word be preferred to revolution). It is a slum that has decided to clean its own house. Who will win its allegiance, the Gas House Gang or the reform administration? Certainly the vestrymen of the uptown church—the imperialists—have lost it. The only answer that sense dictates is a rational and by no means extravagantly costly application of Point Four. The managers of the Bold New Program will find Mr. Jacoby's book the best over-all study of its subject, though statistically not up to date. I regret to have to say that it is too highly specialized for the general reader.

—LEWIS GALANTIÈRE



Southeast Asia superimposed on two maps of the United States

To The Reporter

Nothing Unusual

To the Editor: It seems to this Southern editor that Llewellyn White handled his "No News from Richmond" (page 22, your November 22 issue) assignment admirably.

Roanoke is proud that the Negro attorney on Richmond's City Council was born and raised here.

It might also interest you to know that we have had a prominent Negro dentist on our city school board for several years—an appointee of the council. There also are several Negro police officers who are making good, much to every citizen's pleasure.

Last March the city passed a \$4,200,000 bond issue for new schools. Top priority item on the list was one million dollars for a new Negro high school. When complete it will be far more modern and comfortable than the white high schools.

This community prides itself on the sensible co-operation between races, and sees nothing unusual about it.

M. CARL ANDREWS
Roanoke, Virginia

'What We Stand For'

To the Editor: Why don't you have reprints made of the editorial "What We Stand For" in your December 20, 1949, issue, and enclose them with cards announcing the receipt of a Christmas-gift subscription? In my opinion, it is an excellent editorial, and would make a good prospectus for new readers—even better than your first one.

DIANA STEWART
New York City

[We are following Miss Stewart's most helpful suggestion.—The Editors]

Blame the British

To the Editor: The article "With or Without Britain" on page 21 of your December 20, 1949, issue shows that your correspondent Flavius is following an old continental tradition: If anything goes wrong, blame the British.

In the course of the past fifteen years, we have seen Britain, at various times, blamed for: not intervening in the war in Spain; intervening in the war in Spain; rearming; not rearming fast enough; not going to war over Czechoslovakia; going to war over Poland; not being able to retaliate for the bombing of London; retaliating too hard for the bombing of London.

I have even heard brassy German sympha-

thizers "exonerate" their "poor Germany" and place all war onus on the British "for allowing Hitler to come to power!" Now your Flavius again blames the British—this time for allegedly obstructing European union. The only thing the British don't get blamed for is standing alone against Hitler's might in 1940-1941. The world seems to have forgotten that.

But if a gossamer French Government blows apart, if the crops fail, if your children are naughty, or the weather bad—the British are behind it! The late Don Marquis wrote a phrase that might well be applied to the many continentals who have fallen into the blame-the-British habit: "The great Alibi lkes of the Universe."

BERTRAM HENRY
Flushing, New York

Diplomatic Representation

To the Editor: I feel constrained to express my wonder at your short article entitled "The Ambassador" (September 13, 1949, page 20) in which the argument runs that the United States has erred in removing its diplomatic representation from Spain and has thus deprived itself of both a means of communication with the people of Spain and a source of information about them.

Two statements in particular ("We have

withdrawn from Spain. . . . The case of Spain seems the perfect example of the utter futility of the policy of breaking relations . . .") indicate that you are under the impression that we have no diplomatic representation in Spain. This, of course, is not true. We have not broken relations with Spain, and we are represented by a sizably staffed embassy in Madrid (minus, it is true, an ambassador), operating much the same as any U. S. diplomatic office in any other part of the world. Further, according to the latest *Foreign Service List* (October 1, 1949, U. S. Government Printing Office) we also have consular establishments at Barcelona, Bilbao, Málaga, Seville, Tenerife (Canary Islands), Valencia, and Vigo. It seems to me that these offices fulfill both functions of communication and information.

If, however, as I surmise, your argument would now be, but for other reasons, that we have erred in failing to name an ambassador to Spain even though retaining our diplomatic and consular offices, I should like to invite your attention to the statement made to the press on May 11, 1949, by Secretary of State Dean Acheson. He made a number of remarks which are very much to the point and which I think you have overlooked. Following is an excerpt:

" . . . in and of itself this question of whether or not ambassadors, as distinct from chargés d'affaires, are in Madrid is a matter of no real importance at all . . . this question . . . arouses a great deal of emotion . . . because it is a symbol of something else. The reason the 1946 Resolution [General Assembly of the United Nations] was passed is rooted in history . . . having ambassadors . . . is important only if it becomes a symbol, and if it becomes a symbol . . . of the fact that after all we don't care much about [individual] rights, then it is a bad symbol. If it ceased to be a symbol it wouldn't make any difference to anyone whether you had an ambassador or whether you didn't."

RUFUS Z. SMITH
Balboa, Canal Zone

Contributors

As a war correspondent, Jack Belden covered campaigns in China, Burma, North Africa, and Sicily. He was badly wounded with advance elements of the 36th Infantry Division at Salerno September 9, 1943, but recovered in time to see the fighting in France and Germany in 1944-1945. Afterwards, anxious for a first-hand look at the thing convulsing China, he spent many months behind the Communist lines gathering material for his most recent book, *China Shakes the World*. Sesame Garden, the village of his *Reporter* story, is a real one. Its people, and the events he relates, also are genuine; only the names have been changed. . . . Edgar Snow, an associate editor of *The Saturday Evening Post* and author of *Red Star Over China*, probably knows Mao Tse-tung better than any other western correspondent. Snow met Mao in 1936. . . . James Burke recently returned from Peking, whence he was filing dispatches to *Time* and *Life*. . . . Otto van der Sprenkel is back from a two-year stay in Tientsin as a visiting professor at Nankai University. . . . Derk Bodde is assistant professor of Chinese at the University of Pennsylvania. . . . John K. Fairbank, a professor of Far Eastern History at Harvard, once headed OWI operations in China. . . . Geoffrey Sawer teaches law at the Australian National University. . . . Bruno Foa, who wrote *Monetary Reconstruction in Italy*, is a consulting economist. Cover by Dong Kingman. Inside cover photographs and photographs on pages 4-25 by Henri Cartier-Bresson—Magnum.

The Editors

A high-contrast, black and white photograph. In the foreground, a man is reclining in a chair, appearing to be asleep. He is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt and shorts. His head is tilted back, and his eyes are closed. Behind him, standing in the shadows, is another person, possibly a woman, wearing a dark, traditional-looking garment. The background is dark and indistinct, with a small, bright light source visible on the left side. The overall mood is somber and quiet.

PRODUCED 2004 BY UNZAI *A temple attendant takes a nap*
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NEXT ISSUE

**OUR
FOUNDING
UNCLES**



AND

**THEIR PRESENT-DAY
DESCENDANTS**

WARD-HEELERS

LOGROLLERS

POLITICAL BOSSES