

Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance 1918-1939. By R.F. Holland. Macmillan: Cambridge Commonwealth Series, London, 1981. 248pp. Price: £20.00.

THIS IS an original work, marred by careless mistakes. Although it covers familiar ground it is a pioneering effort at doing so through the files of the Dominions Office, and the related Cabinet papers. It is also a welcome attempt to consider Anglo-Dominions relations between the wars against the economic and international background rather than viewing them in narrowly constitutional terms.

The central theme is the development by Britain of institutions and conventions for the 'management' of Commonwealth relations as a response to growing weakness evident after 1918. 'Empire Foreign Policy' in the early 1920s was seen as a way to maintain an element of 'unilateralism'. An imperial economic system was seen as a way to manage resources and insulate an 'Empire economy'. Imperial defence (a minor part of the book) was supposed to share commitments, and widen careers prospects for Dominion officers.

But by the later 1920s and early 1930s these aspects of the imperial ideology had proved ineffective. The Locarno treaties showed that British and Dominions' interests did not coincide. The Ottawa conference led to such hard bargaining as to 'brutalise' Anglo-Dominions relations. In defence Britain had the commitments but the Dominions refrained from making any. By 1930 most of Whitehall was dissatisfied with the Commonwealth. The relationship had now become 'negotiable', as a matter of hard assessment of cost and benefit. Yet the deteriorating international climate ensured that co-operation continued and by the second half of 1939 something approaching unanimity was possible.

Three subsidiary themes deserve comment. First, Holland gives a new perspective on the main constitutional changes. He sees 1926 as a political bargain: Britain agreed to dismantle Westminster's Imperial role so that Canadian, South African and Irish leaders could appease their nationalists. The Dominion leaders equivocated over the indivisible Crown so that Britain could 'play the Empire card' in international affairs. He sees the Statute of Westminster as less significant than the Irish External Relations Bill. By late 1930 'ties' had succeeded ideology. Secondly, he has interesting material on the Dominions Office. He sees it trapped in a system in which Dominions' nationalists were always appeased to facilitate cooperation, but cooperative initiatives were rejected for fear of arousing Dominion nationalists. At the same time the D.O. pulled little weight in Whitehall, which condemned it to tactics rather than strategy. Yet the D.O. officials were often far-seeing. They mused in the 1930s over a multi-racial Commonwealth which would facilitate membership by Egypt and India. They were against a protective system at the time of Ottawa. They wanted negotiations with the Irish Free State over De Valera's policies—a view which the rest of Whitehall and the politicians came round to by the time of the Abyssinian crisis. The chapter on 'The Irish Impact' is one of the best and shows that the D.O. tried a definition of the Commonwealth which did not rule out a Republican Dominion. It looks, in fact, very like some later formulas, 'the real value of the Commonwealth is that it may well save the world, not only by its exertions . . . but by its example of the proper method of conducting relations between different states'. Such flexibility was seen as 'wise statesmanship'.

Thirdly, there is a long chapter on the Commonwealth and the 'International Crisis 1931-39' in which Holland suggests that the Dominions never developed

approaches on major issues 'outside British policy'. What they had was 'a set of ill-defined preferences and instinctive responses'. This is hardly fair comment on New Zealand Labour's brave stand over Abyssinia, Spain, China and the League Covenant. But he has new material on how irritated the British were over this.

These are interesting themes, even though the argument is somewhat convoluted at times. The book is a work for specialists who know the area. They will be disappointed by too many proof reading errors and some careless slips. General Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, although identified in a footnote as CIGS, is twice referred to as 'Admiral Massingberd'. There are several references to the New Zealand External Affairs Department which, of course, did not exist at this time for the purposes covered in this book—it was the origin of the Department of Island Territories. He even writes, like so many students, 'Ghandi'. The index is too brief. These faults should not detract from a work which, though allusive and not always easy to follow, has many real flashes of insight.

W. DAVID McINTYRE

University of Canterbury

Rewi Alley of China. By Geoff Chapple. Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, 1980. 230pp., photographs. N.Z. price: \$14.95.

FROM A perspective of 1982 Rewi Alley does not at first glance seem to belong in either New Zealand or Chinese history. The pioneering urge which animated much of Alley's work in China seems irrelevant now in New Zealand where it may have been little more than a tribal myth to make a virtue of a perceived cultural inferiority to the Mother Country. Now New Zealand 'pioneers' uproot and jet to Australia to rough it in suburban Sydney.

Rewi Alley's pioneering restlessness took him off a failed farm in Taranaki and put him on a boat to Shanghai in 1927. Over half a century later it is not easy to see what concrete relevance Rewi Alley has in China, apart from being a symbol of internationalism. For the last thirty years Alley has worked as a propagandist, presenting through travel accounts (including poetry of often dubious merit) a view of changes in China since 1949. Alley is clearly sensitive to the criticism of over-positive writing. In his biography, Geoff Chapple quotes his subject, 'But if you do present negative things along with the good, people in China seize on that, and say that's what you're talking about.' (p.88) So Rewi Alley spends his old age, with limited recognition outside of educated Chinese circles (in contrast to New Zealanders' proud tendency to over-estimate his reputation amongst all Chinese), rightly honoured by his hosts (his eightieth birthday was reported on the front page of *People's Daily*), but still the perpetual guest, an outsider, a *waiguoren* (outlander).

From the perspective of 1949, on the other hand, Rewi Alley's life and work in China seemed to have considerable relevance to the urgent tasks of eliminating poverty and ensuring equality of economic and social opportunity in a country of about one quarter of mankind. The more than thirty subsequent years spent as a