

5. A GOOD SHOE-HORN FOR OUR INTERESTS

Richard Casey struggled throughout his career to generate interest in Asia and in Australia's foreign aid program. In 1954 he lamented in his diary that Australians were 'living in a fool's paradise of ignorance about the East'. 'Most people', he continued, 'are hostile to the UN — hostile to the Colombo Plan — and unsympathetic with Asia'.¹ Strict export restrictions and the Treasury department's reluctance to look beyond domestic economic concerns were constant thorns in Casey's side. But the essence of the problem, as he explained to diplomat Walter Crocker, was that his colleagues simply saw 'no immediate material advantage' in giving away millions of pounds. Lacking Percy Spender's punch, Casey's verbose Cabinet orations compounded the problems.² His biographer notes

succinctly that he was ‘not tough enough, cunning enough or politician enough to carry Cabinets with him’. Moreover, he felt that Treasury and the Cabinet ignored his attempts to pursue Colombo Plan objectives in a financially restrained and responsible way. In fact, he believed it worked to his disadvantage. ‘Being honest and accommodating doesn’t seem to pay’, a forlorn and frustrated Casey noted in his diary.³ But he learned quickly that grafting Cold War priorities onto his submissions generated greater momentum and interest for Australian aid initiatives. In August 1954, Casey outlined his vision to Menzies:

The Colombo Plan is a good shoe-horn for our interests. What we most want to see in South East Asia is the development of stable, democratic and friendly governments. In other words — a group of reliable buffer states between ourselves and the Communist drive to the South — although we must never call them that. I believe our main endeavour should be to give further positive aid towards attaining this objective with every weapon in our armoury — ranging from diplomatic relations, through increasing cultural contact and economic support, to less respectable activities.⁴

Over the decade, as the Menzies Government employed the Colombo Plan to fight in the Cold War, Casey tested the political and moral limits of Australia’s aid program.

By the mid-1950s, Australia’s Cold War objectives in South–East Asia were to support friendly and stable anti-communist governments, improve economic development, exchange security intelligence with friendly nations, build strategic alliances with the United States, and improve

cultural and diplomatic relations with Asia. In the longer term, the Government initiated a more nebulous campaign to convince Asia's political elites, and the population at large, that communism was not in their interests.⁵ Exploratory discussions about Cold War activities took place in December 1954 when an inter-departmental committee met to consider the development of a coordinated Western approach to Cold War planning.⁶ The committee concluded that a tightly-defined Cold War plan was essential and that it was important for a single department to be made responsible for Australia's effort.⁷ On 7 January 1955, Cabinet approved Casey's submission that he, and his department, should assume full responsibility for coordinating Australia's Cold War planning.⁸

The Colombo Plan appeared to be an easy and relatively inexpensive way to solidify political and military support in an unstable regional context, in conjunction with the Western alliance. While responding to a defence appreciation, which concluded that overt military conflict in South and South-East Asia was unlikely, Casey told Cabinet that non-military measures were likely to assume greater prominence and yield more success than conventional military strategies. He warned that the political situation to the north remained no less grave in the light of the reassessment. Emphasising the point, Casey argued that Australia's direct interest in the outcome of the Cold War was 'greater than that of any other non-Asian power'. To meet the new situation, Australia needed to exchange information with other Western powers, provide technical assistance to local security forces, produce propaganda and information to counter communist activity, promote democratic and pro-Western values, and eliminate communist influence in schools, trade unions, youth organisations, and other political, cultural, and religious

organisations. Foreign aid emerged as one of the few measures which could be applied to such a diffuse and difficult task. The challenge to incorporate the Colombo Plan into a sophisticated propaganda strategy clearly excited Casey, who demanded that 'we must be prepared to pursue policies in the Cold War with no less energy than is required for the preparedness of our armed forces'.⁹

The nature of the work probably took Casey back to his time as a deception planner during the Second World War. Days after Cabinet had approved his control of Cold War planning, Casey wrote to Arthur Tange, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), about the need to enhance Australia's Cold War effort. 'The whole of this business of anti-subversive work is almost a virgin field', he enthused. 'It has fascinating possibilities for the exercise of imagination. We must organise discussion groups of selected individuals to meet periodically — men likely to strike fire from uninhibited discussion with each other'. While Casey restated the central importance of foreign aid to Cold War strategy, he cautioned Tange that the 'ordinary accepted aims' of the Colombo Plan might have to be 'stretched' to accommodate the new campaign.¹⁰

Casey was eager to supplement the growing pool of talent working for the DEA, in order to facilitate these 'uninhibited discussions'. In January 1955, he mentioned to Tange the possibility of seconding John Hood to Canberra to lead a section devoted to Cold War activities. Hood had developed a reputation as a diligent and reflective political analyst during the war while working as an adviser to Colonel W.R. Hodgson (Secretary of the DEA between 1935 and 1945), and then as External Affairs Officer in London. Hood's pen, according to Casey, was 'his sharpest and most effective tool',¹¹ making him highly suitable as a 'senior back room thinking boy'.¹² Casey's praise was more

than an idle comment, because three days later Tange recalled Hood from Bonn for six months' work in Canberra. On his way to Australia, he discussed Cold War planning with the British Foreign Office, before meeting Casey in Bangkok for the Manila Treaty Conference.¹³

The establishment of Australia's Cold War campaign was, of course, secretive and sensitive. However, the Australian press soon became aware of Hood's appointment as director of the 'psychological warfare campaign'.¹⁴ While visiting London, Tange, realising what was at stake, sent a sharp directive to Acting Secretary James Plimsoll and the Minister:

*I strongly believe, while it may be inevitable and even desirable that some of our proposals be publicly discussed, we shall make ourselves suspect all over Asia if these activities are described as 'Cold War' exercises ... In any case we will be embarrassed by persistent enquires from other Governments if there is too much public talk of Hood's functions in the Department and I want public explanations kept to an absolute minimum.*¹⁵

Australia's growing propaganda and security interests in South-East Asia were bringing the DEA and Casey into much closer relations with defence and intelligence strategists. Casey's diaries and correspondence reveal his consuming interest in developing a propaganda machine. The warm and intimate tone of Casey's letters to Alfred Brookes, the first director of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), was a departure from his characteristic formality. The large number of letters they exchanged suggests that they had a series of discussions and meetings about subversive techniques to counter the infiltration of the police, armed forces, government

departments, and the priesthood. In one letter to Brookes, Casey remarked that, given the 'insidious methods' deployed by the communists, he felt obligated to do his utmost to expose publicly these underhanded tactics. Casey then asked Brookes for his opinion on the idea of creating a 'corps of whisperers' working in South-East Asia.¹⁶ This intriguing mention of a team of spies was followed up a year later with a cryptic diary entry. Casey wrote that the propaganda campaign was all about 'helping the goodies and unhelping the baddies [and] helping the local governments on the security side and inspiring people to say the right things'.¹⁷ Was this a reference to the 'corps of whisperers' Casey hoped to have roving the halls of Asia's political institutions?

The apparent scientific and technological superiority of the Soviet Union — which culminated in the launch of Sputnik on 4 October 1957 and the beginning of the missile age — hardened Australia's commitment to covertly fighting the Cold War with foreign aid. Competition for political and economic control would now extend rapidly into the realms of science, technology, economic and social development, and propaganda. And perhaps, thought Western political leaders, the increasingly restive and assertive leaders of Asia would be convinced that the future lay with the Soviet model of economic planning. Away from the traditional front line of Cold War confrontation in Europe, Australian posts across Asia carefully reported the development of relations with the communist bloc. The High Commission in Ceylon, for example, reported to Canberra as early as September 1956 on an agreement signed between Russia and the Ceylonese that included plans for diplomatic representation, trade cooperation, and a tour by educationalists and a troupe of 'ballerinas [who were to] visit a large number of schools, attend cultural shows,

and hold conferences with teachers' unions'.¹⁸ Later, the ubiquitous 'Skoda' trademark was registered in Ceylon to cover vehicles, machinery, and metallurgical products.¹⁹ The Australian High Commission remained optimistic that Ceylon's lack of traditional markets in the communist bloc would prevent it from becoming dependent on them for vital commodities; it subsequently reported in 1958 that there had been little impact on either Australian or British trade relations.²⁰

Likewise, the British Foreign Office grew wary of the new situation emerging in South Asia. Although the official political assessments were notably calm, British officials recommended that aid donors place greater emphasis on propaganda and give the Colombo Plan Information Unit a more prominent role. The Russians aimed at 'extending their prestige and influence in South-East Asia through various offers of economic assistance', one Foreign Office official wrote. Their aid initiatives might have been small, but 'comparisons apart, it is still a significant amount, and there is no doubt that the Russian economy is wealthy enough to provide it ... [and] we may be certain that Soviet propaganda ... will make the most of it'.²¹ The 'promise of Russian aid' spurred Casey to boost the profile of Australia's Colombo Plan programs. In addition to the likes of Brookes, Hood, and Galvin, Casey liaised regularly with Senator (and future Prime Minister) John Gorton and Brigadier Dudley-Clark, head deception planner for the United Kingdom in the Middle East during the Second World War. At Casey's request, Dudley-Clark submitted a detailed report on propaganda strategies Australia might consider implementing.²² Among the extensive proposals, use of the Colombo Plan as part of a 'bolder approach to the whole matter of advertising Australia to other countries' featured prominently.²³ The

report also included a section on ‘influencing the Australian mind’ in relation to South–East Asia. Casey immediately wrote to Tange recommending that the DEA restructure the Colombo Plan. ‘We should drag our feet on the economic aid side and speed up the technical assistance side’, he wrote. ‘The latter is the side that has inherently vastly more publicity potential, which we must exploit’.²⁴

One person Casey hoped would push the intellectual boundaries of the DEA’s propaganda strategy was the multi-talented John Galvin. A journalist by training, Galvin joined the British Special Operations Executive in Hong Kong during the Second World War. Casey knew him to be a difficult character, but was convinced of his ‘genius’.²⁵ After making his fortune by purchasing Malayan tin mines immediately after the Japanese surrender, Galvin moved to San Francisco where he occasionally associated with the Australian Consul-General, Stewart Jamieson.²⁶ Casey wrote to Laurence R. McIntyre, Senior External Affairs Representative in London, about the elusive Galvin:

*With the Cold War hotting up in South East Asia, Galvin might well be of use to us. He’s an imaginative fellow — and not obsessed with too many scruples — and I’d expect that he knows a good many people of S.E. Asia. If I were ‘by chance’ to run across him again, it might well be that we could, between us, evolve some means of his being useful to us, possibly in unorthodox ways.*²⁷

In fact, the CIA became interested in using Galvin as part of a covert weapons shipping operation to Indonesia, but decided against him because of his unpredictable and flamboyant nature. It is not clear whether Galvin ever

became a member of Casey's Cold War team, although it seems unlikely. He was last reported to have fled America for Ireland in the late-1950s, closely pursued by the US Inland Revenue Service.²⁸

Other members of the Commonwealth Public Service shared Casey's interest in fighting the Cold War in Asia through propaganda and development projects. He diligently and enthusiastically recruited these individuals during his time as minister. The result was a diverse collection of people who came together to generate ideas about how to engage with Asia, both in a defensive sense with propaganda, and in a more progressive way through cultural and educational links. This counters the myth that Casey was a lone advocate of engagement with the region. Certainly, Casey did have trouble persuading his Cabinet colleagues of the importance of his work, but he had the support of a dedicated department which, under Tange, pursued a dynamic and forthright development of South-East Asian foreign policy. Although the DEA was responsible for the overall coordination of Australian Cold War planning, ideas and strategies were drawn from a range of people and departments. Key members of the Cold War activities committee — which later became the Overseas Planning Committee (OPC) — included Tange, John Hood, A. Griffith, James Plimsoll, Charles Kevin, Malcolm Booker, and William Landale. The members from outside the DEA were Allen Stanley Brown (Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department), R.J. Randall (Treasury), Brookes and R. Ellis²⁹ (ASIS), Arthur Noel Finlay (ABC), Kevin Murphy (ANIB) and A.P. Fleming (Defence). Other DEA staff who contributed much to the development of ideas generated at these committee meetings included John Quinn, David McNicol, John E. Oldham, John Davis, and the future director of ASIS, Ralph Harry.

The OPC devised a basic set of principles to guide Australia's information activities in South-East Asia. The critical aspects of the policy can be summarised in three general points. First, Australia was to be depicted as being in the early stages of development and thus sharing many Asian developmental problems. Second, Australia was not a great power and should not be feared; 'on the contrary the existence of a stable neighbour such as Australia should be a source of reassurance'. Third, propaganda was expected to emphasise the ways in which Australia's economic stability benefited the entire region — 'cooperation was advantageous to all'.³⁰

In order to achieve these goals, Australia's Cold War planners argued that propaganda activity needed to address specific problems faced by Asians, in a manner that was not overly theoretical or didactic. They hoped to counter communism by focusing on people's daily concerns and promoting the material benefits of democratic institutions, rather than by relying merely on negative scaremongering. Paradoxically, the OPC was wary of promoting democracy too forcefully, as this might offend undemocratic — but nevertheless anti-communist — governments, upon which Australia depended to resist the red menace. Policy-makers determined that Australia should support a stable, but undemocratic government in the absence of a viable alternative, lest a dangerous political vacuum be created. Australian influence would be best achieved by emphasising the virtues of Australia's advanced social, industrial, and administrative infrastructure and by educating Asians about how they could achieve this level of development. The final, but by no means least significant, goal was to convince Asians that Australia's immigration policy did not imply any animosity towards Asians.³¹

The committee was keenly aware that the United States and the United Kingdom were spending considerable

sums on propaganda. Australia's much smaller financial capacity heightened the DEA's sense that a carefully targeted program would have to be initiated to avoid merely being lost in the flood of Western propaganda already testing the 'digestive capacity of the area'.³² With some success, Casey and his department appointed diplomatic personnel who ensured that stories about Australia (many involving Colombo Plan projects) were distributed to local media.³³ In September 1956, a distressed British Embassy staffer in Rangoon, P.H. Gore Booth, wrote to the Foreign Office about the lack of publicity for British Colombo Plan projects. He lamented that he never heard about British endeavours but saw that the Australian and New Zealand programs received 'constant publicity' in local Burmese and English papers. Gore Booth even claimed that ministers and politicians invariably spoke as if 'Australia and New Zealand were alone running the Colombo Plan'. He ended his letter with a plea: 'I really do hope that you will be able to find some solution. But bluntly, the Australian and New Zealand effort, particularly in regard to photographs, makes us look like a lot of bungling amateurs'.³⁴ Evidently, diplomatic staff had heeded Casey's drive to extract every ounce of publicity from Colombo Plan projects, at least in Burma. That such publicity was making an impression at the highest level would have pleased Casey greatly.

From the DEA's point of view, the more people who came into direct contact with Australian aid projects the better. Indeed, the DEA cited this as one of the major reasons for supplying 100 diesel buses to Indonesia: 'they would be an especially tangible form of aid which would bring the Colombo Plan to the attention of the mass of the inhabitants of Djakarta'.³⁵ To remove all confusion about the origin of the buses, a hand-sized plate with a map of Australia was fixed at eye-level near the front entrance.

Visibly branding Australian projects became an important feature of the Colombo Plan. Just as donated equipment came well-labelled, by the mid-1960s students, too, were encouraged to display their Colombo Plan credentials with a special badge, lapel pin, or brooch made of an 'antique silver' alloy, which the designers promised would never tarnish in tropical conditions.³⁶

The effectiveness of Australian-sponsored aid projects affected their value as propaganda. Conversely, the overwhelming emphasis on shallow publicity had a direct bearing on the long-term benefits generated by the Colombo Plan. Western aid donors quickly learnt how fickle aid recipients could be and just how tenuous attempts to instigate a deep ideological shift with foreign assistance could be. In 1954, the British reported from Afghanistan (which joined the Consultative Committee in 1963) that Soviet propaganda conducted by the technical experts sent to carry out the development project meant that 'the Afghan population as a whole tends to become pro-Soviet in direct response and proportion to the material benefits which it receives'. However, the Afghan government's staunch non-alignment policy ensured that Western attempts to match or compete with Soviet programs would see the acceptance of a Soviet overture in order to maintain an appropriate balance. This frustrating commitment to neutralism meant that the government of Afghanistan will 'never be won over to the spirit of Western cooperative effort or allow that spirit to effect [sic] their political attitude. They can, in short, be politically bought but not politically converted'.³⁷

The DEA's ideas about propaganda exposed their assumptions about Asian people and their political institutions. A common theme in the department's thinking was that Asian political structures seemed to

possess a natural tendency towards authoritarianism and corruption. Moreover, it was believed that ordinary citizens passively accepted these flaws as an intrinsic part of the political and cultural landscape. As one OPC paper suggested: 'A certain amount of despotism seems unavoidable in some Asian countries and is often taken as a matter of course by the population. Where we have to work with and through despotic government, there is nothing much we can do about it anyway'.³⁹ Some members of the department, such as Counsellor John Oldham, head of Information Branch, posited theories about the changes occurring in Asia, despite having almost no experience of Asians. Asians, he claimed, were more susceptible to propaganda because they endured poverty, feudalism, and anti-colonialist rhetoric and, generally, suffered from a 'lack of experience of genuine freedom and responsible government'.³⁹ But Oldham was hopeful, sensing a movement in Asian philosophy away from fatalism towards a belief in development and progress through social and political change.

Clearly, increasing aid to Asia did not necessarily correspond to a more detailed understanding of decolonisation and the complex interplay between nationalism, communism, and post-colonial power struggles. In fact, political rhetoric about the transformative power of foreign aid tended to reinforce the simplistic, yet powerful, idea that poverty acted as a seedbed for communism, and that liberal democracy was inseparable from economic individualism. While such theories were deeply seductive, a more moderate and complex interpretation was available to the government. Four years after his 'Goodwill Tour' of Asia in 1948, Melbourne academic Macmahon Ball published *Nationalism and Communism in East Asia*, one of the first attempts to comprehend the political, social, and economic

aftermath of decolonisation in Asia from a Western perspective. While he thought it important for Western democracies to win the support of non-communist Asia, he argued that the current strategy was destined to fail. He warned against heavy-handed military solutions, stressed the dangers of assuming that 'Western ways have universal appeal', and criticised Western policy-makers' view of the talismanic role of science and technology. By explaining that there was 'no simple correlation between poverty and Communism', Macmahon Ball undermined the foundations of the Western aid policy. He feared that if economic aid merely increased national income with no regard for its equitable distribution, productivity increases were likely to exacerbate social disintegration rather than reduce it — except, of course, in the case of technical and scientific training.⁴⁰

The OPC agreed. They reasoned that the Colombo Plan and other 'do-good schemes' may have been able to improve living standards generally, but they had a tendency to 'make the rich richer', thereby exacerbating social and political tensions.⁴¹ Such interpretations, however, did not lead to a reassessment of the effectiveness of the aid program itself and the welfare programs in place in Asian countries. Instead, they lent support to arguments for covert strategies to deal with communist activity, strategies that would supposedly take effect more quickly than the long-term development projects, the impact of which was less tangible.

Shortly after the inception of the Colombo Plan, Australian diplomatic posts throughout Asia received requests to train local personnel in police and security methods. Spender had made it clear to Cabinet in 1951 that, 'short of armed force', improving the efficiency of police administration in the region was the only means of

securing stable democratic governments. The Thai police department was the first to request assistance, in October 1951, followed by Burma, Pakistan and Ceylon.⁴² In September 1953, Pakistani officials approached the Australian High Commission in Karachi about the possibility of police officers undertaking further training in Australia. DEA staff explained to Casey that, provided instruction was restricted to criminal investigation methods and did not extend to ASIO or special branch training, the requests could be funded under the technical assistance program because the civil police organisation was a component of the public administration infrastructure.⁴³ Plimsoll, as Acting Secretary, wrote to Alan Watt, former Secretary of the DEA and now the Australian Commissioner in Singapore, about the possibility of police and military training for Burmese officers. Among other matters, Plimsoll briefed him on talks with the UK and US delegations and emphasised that officers should not portray police and military training 'as Cold War activities'. However, his qualifying remarks are significant:

the broad objective of the Colombo Plan is to combat communism, [and] we have been careful in the past to keep our contributions quite apart from politics. With regard to military training, it seems essential that the Burmese should not be given the impression that we regard this as an anti-communist move as they might then consider it an infringement of their neutrality and even reconsider their use of Australian facilities.⁴⁴

In 1955, Casey breached the distinction between public administration training and covert counter-propaganda training, further politicising the Colombo Plan. He met with Charles Spry, Director General of ASIO, and asked him to

train a small group of English-speaking Thai police in anti-subversive techniques — training that would ostensibly be financed under the Colombo Plan budget.⁴⁵ By October 1955, training was well underway and state police departments expressed a willingness to participate in a much larger program. The DEA then asked Manila Treaty countries whether they needed further assistance in this field.⁴⁶ Spry immediately indicated that ASIO, pending available funding, would organise two courses a year for Asian intelligence officers in counter-subversion techniques.⁴⁷ A complete record of the number who undertook these courses does not exist, but there is direct evidence of security training of Asian officials taking place in Australia.⁴⁸ One notable trainee was Tran Van Khiem, ex-press secretary to the President of Vietnam, who completed four months of training in the period 1955–56 with ASIO and the Victorian and NSW police on a Colombo Plan scholarship. He was trained in security methods that he hoped would provide him with the skills to ‘cope with the terrorist war in Saigon’.⁴⁹

Some members of the DEA and ASIO expressed doubts about the practicality of security training and were inclined to refer such requests to UK Special Branch divisions, which had begun advanced courses in counter-espionage in Malaya and Singapore during the mid-1950s. Spry also raised concerns about the ‘language problem’ and the embarrassing ignominy of providing training to potentially hostile countries. The DEA dismissed such reservations because they had the potential to undermine the entire basis of Colombo Plan training. As Max Loveday, acting head of the Defence Liaison Branch, suggested: ‘If we follow Spry’s reasoning we should consider cancelling other Colombo Plan offers — because I don’t think the security training courses [are] much different from, say, an engineering course if we are considering the dangers of

training potential enemies'.⁵⁰ The number of Colombo Plan police trainees rose substantially after 1956, to over 100 by 1965.⁵¹ The figures, however, do not distinguish between the types of courses undertaken. Of course, given the politically sensitive nature of the training, it is debatable whether these courses would appear in official statistical sources.

As the likelihood of a direct military assault in the region receded, the need to address subversive disruption emerged as a higher priority for the Menzies administration. Talk of a protracted 'psychological war' became commonplace, both inside and outside government circles.⁵² Police training was deemed an appropriate way to combat attempts to overthrow government institutions, but such training had little impact on the attitudes and opinions of local citizens, academics and community leaders. Despite Loveday's assurances, police training was risky, likely to prove counter-productive and diplomatically embarrassing should a government change (or be overthrown) and the allegiance of the police force shift to support a political structure unfriendly — even hostile — to Australia and the West. The DEA spent considerable time developing means by which it could bypass the government and appeal directly to the people. Radio was the medium which captured the Department's imagination.

Australia's overseas broadcasting service, Radio Australia, began operating in 1939, its mission to explain Australian and British policies to people in Asia and the Pacific. John Oldham and others in the DEA proposed that Australian propaganda disseminated to the region move beyond negative, anti-communist rhetoric.⁵³ He believed that the most effective means of increasing awareness of the 'Australian point of view' was an objective and factual presentation of current affairs. The United States Far

Eastern Bureau told Oldham that, in the face of a pervasive anti-American sentiment, Australia was more likely to succeed in promoting a pro-Western viewpoint to Asians. Radio Australia had already proved successful, particularly in Indonesia, and its content and transmission range warranted expansion. The OPC also expected that a sophisticated broadcasting infrastructure, both in Australia and throughout Asia, would yield strategic benefits should war actually break out.⁵⁴ Late in 1954, Oldham suggested that an ambiguously worded May 1950 Cabinet directive, which conferred discretionary control of Radio Australia broadcasts on the editor, be amended to bring information services under direct DEA control. He believed this would 'increase the technical efficiency of Radio Australia and ... make the programme material more effective in countering Communist propaganda and subversion in Asia'. Funding would also be required to bolster ailing infrastructure that was still using equipment assembled in 1945. The network, consisting of one 50-kilowatt transmitter and two 100-kilowatt transmitters in Shepparton and a 10-kilowatt in Lyndhurst (both in Victoria), was especially vulnerable to jamming by powerful communist radio waves. The Department of Defence was particularly concerned because there was no reserve power to cope with breakdowns, as the system was operating at maximum capacity. Australia would need to build a relay station in New Guinea in order to maintain the clarity and reach of the broadcasts.⁵⁵

Earlier, in May 1950, Spender had written to the Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Richard Boyer, informing him that it was crucial that 'Radio Australia be looked at as an instrument of foreign policy'.⁵⁶ Throughout the decade, the DEA demonstrated its determination to exercise a stronger influence over the

content of Radio Australia broadcasts. In 1955, Casey escalated the campaign to take control. Predictably, his argument to Cabinet emphasised the importance of radio 'from a political warfare point of view', in addition to its ability to establish and maintain a political and cultural dialogue with the region.⁵⁷ In a letter to Tange, he outlined his strategy:

*we will need to clear our own minds as to where we want to go and the extent to which Radio Australia broadcasts are to be extended, and the extent to which we would propose to increase their political content — and how this political content is to be compiled and canalised into the Radio Australia machine. Maybe we will have to seek direct control in respect of material to constitute the political content of Radio Australia broadcasts. In other words, we may have to bring it about that External Affairs and not Radio Australia determines what goes into these broadcasts on the non-entertainment side.*⁵⁸

Radio Australia's struggle for autonomy and editorial independence is not the focus of this chapter. Suffice to say that the organisation did not yield easily to the persistent attempts by the DEA to influence content and presentation. However, from August 1955, Radio Australia based its news commentaries on material provided by the DEA, which ensured that relations between the two organisations continued to be antagonistic.⁵⁹

The decision to use radio as the principal instrument to provide information to Asia brought the Colombo Plan to the forefront of attempts to forge political and cultural links between Australia and Asia. While attending a meeting with the United States Information Agency

(responsible for Voice of America's international broadcasts), Percy Spender suggested that the fundamental objectives of Voice of America broadcasts were the same as Radio Australia's, and he envisaged a much closer relationship between the two agencies. Casey proudly told officials of Australia's effort to distribute short-wave and medium-wave radios to village leaders and teachers throughout Asia.⁶⁰ Speed was the key. In early March 1955, the DEA enlisted E.S. Heffer, a radio engineer for Amalgamated Wireless Australasia, to conduct a six-week technical survey of the capacity of Indo-China and Thailand to use and maintain portable radio receivers. The department envisaged that around 1,000 sets would be distributed across the area, with South Vietnam as the highest priority.⁶¹ At the request of the South Vietnamese Minister for Defence, Australia used Colombo Plan funds to supply military units with petrol-driven generators for use in wireless transmission.⁶² The example of Vietnam reflected a wider trend towards promoting the use of radio in Asia. By the mid-1960s around 6.5 per cent of Australia's Colombo Plan allocations for capital aid was being spent on radio equipment, having risen from just 2 per cent in the 1950s.⁶³

The Australian Embassy in Djakarta expressed concern about the effect the expansion of Radio Australia might have on the Colombo Plan. They warned that, without seeking the active participation of the recipient country in the development of radio programs, 'the Indonesians may come to dislike it [thus] affecting the attitude towards the Colombo Plan generally'. Second Secretary Wilfred Vawdrey doubted if any demand for instructional radio existed among the populace. Indonesians, he wrote, seem 'to have little interest in anything but musical programmes and perhaps the news'. As for English lessons, they were already available through

Radio Indonesia and the BBC, and ‘the family circle is probably not going to take kindly to talk on tractor maintenance in place of “listener’s choice”’.⁶⁴ Vawdrey also added that, in any case, a successful teaching program needed trained staff with specialist knowledge about the cultural particulars of each region: ‘Surely this would prove a costly undertaking’, he surmised. Had the need to get something off the ground not been so pressing, such concerns may well have received a sympathetic response. But, with reports flowing back to Canberra warning of the pervasive impact of the communists’ propaganda and the effect of the ‘Communist radio technique’, Australia had to join the fray with whatever resources it could muster.⁶⁵ By September 1955, Indonesian broadcasts had been increased from one to two hours daily, Thai broadcasts from one hour a week to one hour per day, and the hour of Mandarin was due to become two hours daily. Response was positive with almost 3,000 letters, presumably complimentary, received from Indonesian listeners between March and September 1955. In November, over 800 were received. Desperate for any indication of the impact of radio broadcasts, the DEA, on analysing these letters, concluded that the programs were reaching a ‘fairly intelligent audience’.⁶⁶ Travellers to Asia were also aware of Radio Australia’s credibility and integrity, characteristics not afforded as readily to Voice of America. Other letters indicated that listeners considered Radio Australia more friendly and cheerful than the BBC.⁶⁷

For Casey, the English language was more than a means of communication. It connoted modernity, progress, and civilisation: concepts which he considered essential to establishing and maintaining a pro-Western relationship with Asia. As Casey told Brookes, English was a fundamental political and psychological tool, ‘a weapon in our hands’. Other forms of media occupied Casey’s thoughts

during the OPC meetings. Writing to Brookes, months after Oldham had first suggested the idea of employing Colombo Plan monies to bolster South-East Asian newspapers with anti-communist predilections, Casey posed the question: 'Might it not kill at least two birds with one stone if we were to offer to take some free-Asian journalists for attachment and training with selected newspapers in Australia?' The two birds that Casey referred to were the twin desires, to make Australians more aware of their Asian neighbours and to expose Asians to the virtues of Australia's free press. The results were another publicity triumph for Casey. After a team of Indian editors toured Australia in 1957, Peter Heydon, Australia's High Commissioner in New Delhi, rejoiced when he reported to Canberra that on their return to India they wrote enthusiastically about 'the hard-working character of Australians generally and our egalitarianism'.⁶⁸

One of the English-language 'weapons' Casey had in mind was *Hemisphere*, a monthly journal published from March 1957.⁶⁹ Designed specifically to influence the growing Asian student body, the publicly-stated objective of the magazine was to provide a positive and engaging example of the 'tolerant, thoughtful and sceptical spirit of democracy and liberalism' to be found in Australia. However, *Hemisphere* was 'not designed for publicity in the ordinary sense' despite its obvious suitability for such a purpose.⁷⁰ John Hood described the magazine as a 'natural and effective cover for contact and penetration among Asian students', fulfilling its 'covert objective of enabling contact to be made with these students in order to influence them for anti-communist ends'. A suppressed copy of the same committee report disclosed that in addition to its overt purpose of publicising Australian life and conditions and promoting friendly relations with

South–East Asia, ‘the magazine will serve as cover to M.O.9. [codeword for ASIS] in making special contact with Asian students in Australia and also as a link in anti-communist penetration in countries of South and South–East Asia’.⁷¹

With the magazine produced jointly by the DEA and the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE), the use of Colombo Plan funds to finance it forced the government to take particular care ‘not to raise any suspicions of propagandist motives’.⁷² The emergence of other magazines on Asian–Australian affairs also impelled *Hemisphere’s* editors to produce a high-quality and visually appealing journal, lest the government be left with a publication which looked ‘second rate by comparison’.⁷³ With regard to language, the DEA asked the COE to consider revising the ‘preview’ issue to remove words potentially offensive to Asians, such as ‘Chinamen’, ‘sinister little Japanese’, and ‘rickshaw coolies’. Ironically, by adhering to such high standards, Australian representatives in Asia reported that *Hemisphere’s* expensive and glossy appearance, which made the magazine so popular, caused some Asians to query its apparent editorial independence. They advised that the inclusion of more controversial material might allay some of these misgivings.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, circulation rose quickly from around 3,000 in 1959 to around 15,000 in 1967, half of which went to Asia.⁷⁵ Government officials even approached Trans-Australian Airlines (TAA) and Ansett Australian National Airlines (AANA) about the possibility of placing *Hemisphere* on domestic flights as the in-flight magazine. The airlines declined, ‘not because *Hemisphere* was propaganda ... just that the policy of the airline was to avoid anything which might be regarded as “political”’.⁷⁶

During the mid- to late-1950s, there was a general feeling among DEA officers — no doubt influenced by

Casey — that Australia was too passive in its approach to cultural relations. In 1953, the High Commissioner to Pakistan, Raymond Watt, wrote to Casey about the ‘urgent need to make Australians more Asia-minded’ and suggested that the Colombo Plan needed to transcend its focus on economic and technical progress ‘when on the cultural level so much extra could be done, at so little cost, to promote better relations’. Inevitably short of finance, Casey encouraged non-government and non-political groups, such as the Australian–Asian Association, to remedy the cultural malaise.⁷⁷

Building cultural links with Asia saw Casey attempt to establish a subsidy program for selected works of Australian literature to be sold in Asia. The scheme was intended to compete with a similar program initiated by the Soviet and Chinese governments.⁷⁸ The books also formed an important part of Casey’s plan to educate Asian readers and ‘remove misconceptions about Australia and Australian policies’.⁷⁹ Casey approached the managers of Angus & Robertson and Penguin Books, who both agreed to create a series of Australian texts, selected by the DEA, to be sold well below the normal price of books available in Asian countries. A staggering 10,000 copies of each of the following titles were planned to be distributed to Colombo Plan countries: Ernest Titterton’s *Atomic energy*, Vladimir Petrov’s *Empire of fear*, Francis Ratcliffe’s *Flying fox and Drifting sand: the adventures of a biologist in Australia*, and Douglas Mawson’s *Home of the blizzard*.⁸⁰ Despite widespread enthusiasm for the idea and the allocation of £A8,000, the DEA abandoned the Cheap Books subsidy program after more than ten years of discussion because no one could agree on which titles should be included.⁸¹ However, throughout the decade, the Australian government sent substantial numbers of books as gifts under the Colombo Plan to universities and libraries across Asia.

Casey had a strong sense of the images of Australian life he wanted to promote to Asian audiences. Indeed, in his quietly egotistical way, Casey, according to his private secretary Harold Marshall, was particularly pleased with the content and title of his own book, *Friends and neighbours: Australia and the world*, destined for Asia under a US subsidy program.⁸² But, in general, he placed considerable importance on distinguishing Australia from the United States, at a time when he felt it was difficult to express a solely Australian viewpoint in world affairs. It was vital, Casey thought, to establish a regional identity that was independent and non-threatening, an identity that would not attract the ire of an increasingly assertive Asia:

*The kinds of themes I have in mind would include the absence of racial prejudice in Australia, the idea of Australia as a waterless land unsuitable for mass settlement, Australia's past and continuing pioneering efforts — the absence of that decadence attributed to capitalist societies in communist propaganda, our progressive social reforms and the egalitarian nature of Australian society, our request [sic] for human and spiritual rights without the extreme materialism of either Communism or American individualism, the primitive nature of our aborigines and of the New Guinea peoples, and even the beneficial aspects of colonial regimes.*⁸³

It is interesting that Casey positioned Australian society between the Cold War power blocs and the values they appeared to represent. Australia's strength lay in the fact that it was not a major colonial power, but the successful product of a colonial regime serving as a model to the region. There is something else of note in Casey's

musings about creating meaningful links with Asians. In a 1956 submission to Cabinet, Casey argued that Australia was different from other Western countries, not just in terms of its location and former dominion status, but in having something to offer Asia, materially and culturally. He wrote that a concerted effort was needed to convince Asians that Australia was not 'an outpost of an alien culture, antipathetic towards coloured races'. A change from reactor to actor is evident — it was Australia's responsibility to initiate a more positive and meaningful relationship.⁸⁴ It was not surprising that the re-orientation suggested by Casey's words was slight. While this was a long way from an endorsement of racial and cultural pluralism, such a comment suggests a re-conceptualising, if an equivocal one, of Australia's regional identity and was perhaps indicative of the beginnings of a deeper cultural shift.

Casey's faith in the broader cultural impact of the Colombo Plan extended to the domestic arena. Always searching for avenues to muster support for the program and maintain dialogue between Asians and Australians, Casey mooted the idea of inviting members of the public to subscribe to the plan on a 'pound for pound' basis with the government. He believed this had the potential to capitalise on the 'considerable public consciousness of the value of the Colombo Plan ... and give people an opportunity to express themselves in a practical way'. Casey also proposed that particular Australian cities adopt a town or city in one of the Colombo Plan nations and send money or gifts.⁸⁵ The DEA did not take up the idea.

Typically, educational aid proved to be the most enduring way of binding many regional countries to Australia. In 1957 the DEA expanded the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme to include Pacific and North

Asian countries outside the Colombo Plan area. Like the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan (SCAAP), which offered small numbers of scholarships to African students, the tiny number of students funded under the Australian Overseas Scholarship Scheme were intended to connect Australia to as many non-Colombo Plan countries as possible. In the case of Korea — which did not join the Colombo Plan until 1962 — Australia was particularly interested to broaden her international contacts, compensate for Britain's 'lack of interest' and vary the 'very full American diet with which Koreans are served'.⁸⁶ With characteristic impetuosity, Casey later toyed with the idea of extending the program to Iraq.

Although not financed under the Colombo Plan, the 'Asian Visits Fund' was devised by the DEA with similar objectives in mind. No doubt inspired by the American 'International Visitor Program' created under the 1948 Smith–Mundt Act as part of a plan to promote the United States and foster mutual understanding, the modest Asian Visits Fund aimed to build cultural relations between Australia and Asia. Once again, a covert rationale appeared mandatory, with the scheme 'not established purely as a goodwill measure or for cultural exchange, but as a means of achieving definite objectives in the context of the Cold War'. According to Cabinet records, Australia could lure teachers, journalists, government members, trade unionists, or broadcasters from the region with an invitation to explore 'some practical project in which the invitee is interested. It would then be sought in the course of the visit to indoctrinate him generally in relation to [the] Australian way of life'. Conversely, tours by Australians would help introduce Asians to influential and charismatic Australians, in much the same way as the expert program. An annual allocated sum of £A25,000 would fund the travels of around

40 people. Cambodia's Prince Sihanouk — who happened to possess a detailed knowledge of Australian tennis history — requested that the ambassador organise a reputable tennis coach to visit and train young Cambodian players. Good manners were vital, the DEA determined. The department deemed Jack Hopman (brother of Harry Hopman) an appropriately 'conscientious and good-living man' and he later took the four-month job under the auspices of the Asian Visits Fund. By 1964, 377 Asians, Africans and Pacific Islanders had travelled to Australia under the program and 119 Australians had visited South and South-East Asia.⁸⁷

Cultural exchanges, such as through sport, also had definite, if somewhat ill-defined, strategic benefits. Alex Borthwick, First Secretary to the Australia High Commission in Singapore, proposed the funding of sportsmen to travel and coach in Asia. He suggested that Australia pay men such as track-and-field athlete John Landy, swimmer Harry Nightingdale, and tennis champion Frank Sedgeman to coach young athletes in Asia. (In fact, Sedgeman had already played in Ceylon during the 1952 Colombo Exhibition staged to celebrate the beginning of the Colombo Plan). Suggesting the Colombo Plan as a source of funding, Borthwick wrote that he thought the idea 'not entirely bizarre' and perhaps a valuable 'exercise in the Cold War'.⁸⁸ Although he was not in the circle of men Casey had inspired to 'strike fire' from uninhibited discussion of Australia's Cold War effort, Borthwick's ideas would have been a welcome addition to the department's thinking. Sport had greater mass appeal than the performing arts or visiting politicians and it had little of the stigma of aid 'hand outs'. From the mid-1950s, the DEA instructed Asian posts to distribute Australian sporting magazines and newsletters and directed Radio Australia to

give greater attention to sporting events. Later, Colombo Plan finance was used towards the supply of sporting equipment, the construction of sporting fields and arenas, and physical education scholarships. Of course, Australian officials were responding to communist endeavours to cultivate relations with Asia. The Soviet Union established sporting contacts and funded the construction of sporting venues, thus reaping a 'harvest of publicity', according to the DEA.⁸⁹ Colin Moodie, High Commissioner in Rangoon, suggested that Australia stood to gain a great deal by organising athletes to visit the region:

*Particularly in the fields of tennis, golf, swimming, soccer and athletics, there is a considerable field for making a mark on numbers of Burmans who will be able to judge for themselves the bearing of the visitors and their freedom to move and speak as they wished compared with visitors they may receive from the Communist group of countries.*⁹⁰

There is a sub-text to Moodie's words. Contact with Asia through sport was more than a chance to build rapport with ordinary Asians; the mere presence of Australian visitors was a subtle advertisement for Western values. Like many others, Moodie thought that the athletes, through their bearing and attitude, would exude the virtues of freedom and democracy. However, the benefit was double-edged, for not only did it involve Australians travelling and making contact in Asia, the DEA saw it as a 'means of promoting awareness and ... understanding of Asian countries among Australians generally'.⁹¹

Casey, counter-propaganda and Osmar White's Colombo Plan tour

By the mid- to late-1950s, the Colombo Plan became a useful tool for addressing a variety of defensive, political, and cultural issues affecting Australia's place in the region. Casey's influence over the direction and scope of the program remained strong, but he had failed to build any appreciable enthusiasm for the program in Cabinet. Although he was respected, his weak performance in Cabinet was symptomatic of a growing alienation from political life. To some extent, this was self-imposed. Arthur Tange recalled that Casey reinforced his isolation from his department and his political colleagues by refusing to base himself in Canberra, instead returning 'home' to Melbourne each weekend.⁹² Now in his late-60s, he flagged under the strain of the demanding portfolio. Even before the Suez affair and a humiliating defeat in his bid for the position of deputy leader of the Liberal Party, those close to Casey noticed that he looked 'worn and strained', having also developed a nervous, twitching eye.⁹³ The Colombo Plan became something of a crutch, a means of gaining personal exposure while simultaneously promoting Asian affairs to other bureaucrats and members of Cabinet. Crocker, who knew Casey on a professional and personal basis, observed that as Casey became 'befogged' by the complexity of foreign relations 'the more desperately he [clung] to the Colombo Plan', turning it into a 'huge advertising racket for himself'.⁹⁴ Casey's attachment to the plan meant he saw any criticism of it as a personal attack, despite his protestations. In July 1956, he complained to Tange about the 'considerable campaign against the Colombo Plan and against me personally — that the Sydney *Truth* and *Mirror* are conducting. Scarcely a week

goes by without a virulent savage article. I don't believe it is important — but it goes on'.⁹⁵

Publicity for the Colombo Plan occasionally stimulated the community's latent hostility towards foreign aid. With Australia so visibly supporting Asians, it is not surprising that Casey also received his share of racist hate-mail demanding the end of the Colombo Plan and more.⁹⁶ However, despite the generally positive and even-handed treatment in the media, few Australians were aware of the impact Australian funds were actually having on economic and social progress in Asia. Development was, after all, the bedrock of the simplified public rationale for the operation of the aid scheme. Under pressure to bolster his own position in Cabinet, Casey embarked on his most sustained attempt to convince his political colleagues and the public that the Colombo Plan was worthy of financial and moral support.

In 1958, Casey and the DEA became increasingly interested in discovering how effective Australian aid projects were in fulfilling the objectives of the Colombo Plan. A public debate about the use of Australian donations under the plan helped force the government's hand. In April 1958, R.E.G. Cunningham, a former employee of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, spoke to a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and then to the press. He criticised Colombo Plan projects in Pakistan, claiming that he had seen Australian tractors rusting in fields and that 100 sheep sent as part of a breeding program had all died. The criticisms forced Casey to try to minimise the damage. He rebutted the claims, stating that there was a 'degree of experimentation' in such programs and losses were to be expected. But he denied strongly the suggestion that aid money was wasted or misappropriated. Australia worked in 'close consultation with the recipient nations to ensure that equipment was of the right type'.

Furthermore, Casey emphasised that Colombo Plan experts, diplomats, and other officials reported regularly on the effectiveness of Australian aid programs. Casey did receive reports about the effectiveness of Colombo Plan aid, but on a more sporadic and piecemeal basis than he acknowledged publicly. Two months before this flare-up, David Hay, Assistant Secretary of the DEA, had written to Casey lamenting the excessively general nature of the assessment of Australian Colombo Plan projects. Any accurate assessment, he said, could 'only be produced by an experienced "inspector general" able to spend a year or so travelling extensively in the area'.⁹⁷ Hay's idea lay dormant in Casey's mind until after the Cunningham incident.

But Casey chose counter-propaganda over sponsoring an objective assessment of Australian aid projects. In July 1958, he began searching for a 'top line' journalist who would undertake a lengthy tour of the Colombo Plan region and report to the Australian people. The DEA deliberately looked outside government ranks for an independent spirit — a man who could write 'lively, intelligent articles', and more significantly, a man 'who could not be regarded by his fellows as writing material to order'. The man whom Casey eventually commissioned was *Herald and Weekly Times* reporter Osmar White. White had had a distinguished career as a wartime correspondent in the Pacific and Europe. In 1945 he published *Green armour*, an evocative and influential account of the war in New Guinea and the Americans' battle for the Solomon Islands. His intimate knowledge of the region and his clear support of the Allied cause made Casey's decision straightforward. In December 1958, White and Australian News and Information Bureau (ANIB) photographer James Fitzpatrick (not to be confused with the American film producer-writer-director of the same name) left for Pakistan. Their brief was to gather stories, photographs, and film on the impact and influence

of Australia's Colombo Plan contributions. When they returned in June 1959, they had visited 14 countries: Pakistan, India, Nepal, Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaya, Sarawak, North Borneo, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia.⁹⁸

In addition to writing a series of news feature articles, the two men were to produce a documentary film and an illustrated information booklet. Although the DEA had relied on the sporadic reports from Colombo Plan experts and diplomatic dispatches for information on the effect of foreign aid, the White tour was more an opportunity to promote the virtue of Australian aid to Asia than a systematic or comprehensive attempt to assess the impact of Australian economic and technical assistance. Casey had struggled throughout the 1950s to generate Cabinet interest in the aid scheme. The decision to send these two men was part of Casey's strategy to garner popular interest and support for the Colombo Plan. The DEA also hoped to enhance awareness and appreciation of Australian aid among recipient nations.⁹⁹

Before the DEA officially commissioned White for the job, Casey summoned him to Canberra to discuss the objectives of the exercise and, it would seem, to question him about his political beliefs. Later, White wrote to Colin Moodie, Assistant Secretary of the DEA, restating his understanding of his primary responsibility to 'produce feature articles designed to inform the public, how, in human terms the plan is operating, and what value it has' and to write an information booklet. Moodie cautioned White about assigning the booklet secondary importance 'in view of its very considerable long-term importance ... [and its] value to us for publicity purposes for some years to come'.¹⁰⁰ That Moodie was at pains to correct White's seemingly casual comment suggests that he sensed White

had a different understanding of the tour's purpose. White saw his role as providing a broad, critical, and impartial assessment of the program, whereas the DEA saw the production of good publicity as White's principal function.

Casey was particularly concerned to avoid the appearance of government involvement and agreed that White should send his material 'direct to the Features Service for distribution, without the Department exercising any editorial authority'. The DEA publicity machine swung into action and White was provided with a list of former Colombo Plan scholars and fellows who 'for some interesting personal reason, such as their personal charm, their zest for the programme in Australia, their appreciation of life in Australia, etc., placed them a cut above their CP compatriots'. Although the DEA went to some lengths to ensure White's experience would be positive and fruitful for the Australian government, at this stage, government officials relinquished control over the outcome of White's tour. White left Australia believing Casey had giving him 'carte blanche'.¹⁰¹

Neither White (even with his four years as a war correspondent in Europe and the Pacific) nor Fitzpatrick was prepared for their experience in South and South-East Asia. They arrived in Pakistan in the midst of a gastro-enteritis epidemic, and the first two weeks felt like a year. Within a month, the pressure of their fast-paced tour and the strain of adapting to the differing work protocols of Asia began to take their toll. As White complained to his wife, Mollie:

The administrative inefficiency of these people has to be observed — or suffered — to be believed. We both spend endless hours drinking cups of tea, making diplomatic speeches, accepting promises and the only thing that causes some action is a complete screaming blow-up. Against the grain,

I now behave like a burra sahib almost from the beginning, and snap, bark, shout and roar at the drop of a hat. It works, but it's hard on the blood pressure.

Almost immediately, White became concerned because his articles were not being published and Fitzpatrick's photographs were slow to be developed. 'I refuse to worry about this', he continued. 'If the dopes muck up the newspaper side of the assignment, it's their own bloody fault. I have enough trouble with the Paks [Pakistanis] as it is, without taking on our own public service into the bargain'.¹⁰² White later told Moodie that he suspected that Asian officials were only showing him the most successful of Australian Colombo Plan projects and that 'unfavourable facts were being deliberately concealed'. When shown the 200 tractors donated by Australia, White's instincts were aroused: 'My newspaperman's radar indicates most strongly the presence of a rat!' Anticipating a disastrous tour and a series of negative articles, he reminded Moodie of the assurances provided by the DEA for a free editorial hand.¹⁰³

White, a strong believer in the objectives of the Colombo Plan, was disheartened to find widespread waste and neglect in Australian-funded projects and equipment. After five weeks in Pakistan, White and Fitzpatrick arrived in New Delhi and informed Indian High Commissioner Walter Crocker of their moral dilemma. Crocker recorded in his diary that the two men

had found so much corruption and inefficiency and waste in the use of Australian Colombo Plan aid that they could not write their articles, which Casey said could be completely free, without dealing with that side. And if they did the reaction in Australia might well be to put an end to the

Colombo Plan aid and even to put Casey out of office. Should they go on with their mission?

Crocker felt also the pressure of his allegiance to Casey. He felt unable to talk freely about his own misgivings about the Colombo Plan, 'always safeguarding' Casey during his discussion with White and Fitzpatrick. Cautiously, Crocker suggested that White telegram Casey himself. He did so, telling Casey that his first duty as a journalist was to report the situation as he saw it and that he had accepted the job only on the condition that he had full editorial control. Yet, White remained torn between his belief in the developmental and anti-communist objectives of the Colombo Plan and his journalistic desire to 'make headlines'. He told Casey it was the 'knottiest professional problem' he had encountered since the war. Continuing with the tour, White explained his predicament to Robert Furlonger, Acting High Commissioner in Karachi:

it had become apparent that the cumulative effect of publication might make all CP [Colombo Plan] projects unpopular with the Australian public — an effect which, apart from the terms of my present brief, I would deeply regret. So I simply passed the ball to the Minister and will await his reaction before deciding what I must write and how.¹⁰⁴

Casey, sensing the implications of an ambitious and comprehensive assessment by White, requested that he not lose sight of the 'original objectives' of the tour. He asked White to confine his attention to the particular rather than the general: 'I believe there are many stories with individual human interest and appeal which we can look to you to exploit. I would particularly like to see publication of a number of articles about Australian-trained Asians holding

responsible positions or carrying out colourful jobs back in their own countries'. In this case, White faced no moral dilemma, but a real problem: in Pakistan he simply could not find a success story. As he explained to Casey, 'I am searching diligently for individual human stories but so far have found that trainees mostly have been swallowed up in routine public service jobs often unrelated to skills which their Australian training sought to develop'. Again Casey sympathised, but asked him not to circulate his articles prematurely until he had visited more countries, by which time he might have 'a different view of Colombo Plan achievements and shortcomings'. Casey was in the invidious position of imploring White not to reveal his findings, lest they 'make it impossible for him to maintain parliamentary support for the plan'. Clearly, White had stumbled across a myriad of problems associated with aid-giving procedures, but he may have been overzealous in searching for examples of waste and neglect. While passing through India, White complained bitterly to an official about the 'shocking waste' of Australian Colombo Plan material in Nepal, when in fact the Australian goods destined for that country had not even arrived in India.¹⁰⁵

The exchange between Casey and White continued a month later, when White's tour took him to South Vietnam. The issue of waste and mismanagement had not receded. Casey claimed that the Australian government had avoided large-scale infrastructure projects and attempted to supply more experts to oversee and monitor aid projects. Yet Casey's attitude towards the waste was revealing. He warned White not to be perturbed by it, because 'in underdeveloped countries we must inevitably expect more waste and even less efficiency'. Moreover, a loss of effectiveness might be necessary in order to emphasise the non-political nature of the aid. Casey explained his theory to White:

Asian countries [are] extremely sensitive — often peculiarly so — to any implication they are incapable of running their own affairs on their terms ... I believe that the success of the Colombo Plan and the goodwill Australia has won through it is largely due to our basic practice of dealing with Asian governments on a basis of full equality. To achieve this we have had sometimes to accept a loss in efficiency.

‘We are’, he explained, ‘relative new boys in the foreign aid business’. Even the more conspicuous and more rigorously supervised American projects suffered from allegations of waste and inefficiency. Moreover, critics berated the United States for interference in other countries’ international affairs. All things considered, Casey assured White, ‘we have not done so badly in getting a return for money spent in the past, especially when you take into account the intangible factors that I need not stress to you’. Once more, we see Casey focusing on the ‘intangible factors’, the goodwill and prestige, which he hoped would materialise in the minds of those associated with Australian Colombo Plan projects. White would eventually come to share at least a little of Casey’s faith. But for the moment, he continued to struggle with his instincts as a journalist. Days after receiving the cable from Casey, White wrote to Kevin Murphy of the ANIB:

As a newspaper man all my instincts are to scream my head off and be damned to the consequences ... The Colombo Plan and other aid is about the only effective weapon our mob has against the Comms [Communists] in the Mysterious East, and to tell the tough truth to the long suffering taxpayer will go a long way towards blunting the weapon.¹⁰⁶

Talk of censorship found its way to Cecil Edwards, editor of the *Herald and Weekly Times*, who suspected the DEA was vetting White's material. Although White would later deny that he was censored, Edwards asked that White supply him with a list of what he had written in order to determine if 'stories had gone astray'.¹⁰⁷

The professional exposure White was receiving in Australia was some compensation for the intense work. He told Mollie: 'I'm writing for the whole bloody Australian press, now twenty-four articles in all plus five TV scripts and about 40,000 words of confidential reports. This stuff is being used at an intensity which the News and Information Bureau claims is an all-time record for placements'. But, after nearly four months in the field, White's partner, Fitzpatrick, had 'just about packed up under the continued pressure. He's completely slap happy, and has started bullying Burmans and trying to make every shot perfect'. White warned Fitzpatrick that if he continued in this manner he would be recalled. The arduous physical and emotional conditions, combined with Casey's insistence on his holding his fire, undoubtedly tested White's mettle. Venting his frustrations to Mollie, White responded to the challenges by stiffening his resolve to explain the effect of the Colombo Plan exactly as he saw it: 'we've been making the most fearful boners in pure ignorance and the Tiger [Casey] is ruthlessly copping the lot. As you say, my job is to see — and by gum I'm seeing, and he's getting told'. Nonetheless, White's view of the overall effectiveness of the Colombo Plan improved as the tour progressed. In March, he claimed optimistically in a cable to Edwards that the Colombo Plan

seems to be an effective instrument of foreign policy, and in all countries I've seen so far — with the possible exception of India — it had generated a

surprising amount of goodwill. Furthermore, the CP organization has, on the psychological level, handled aid-giving infinitely better than the American ICA [International Cooperation Agency] which, although it has spent vast sums on badly needed projects, is resented and distrusted by Asians — far more so than is warranted by its demerits.

White, however, exercised more tact than his sharp letters might suggest. In late June he met with Casey and Moodie. Once more Casey pleaded that ‘public criticism of the Colombo Plan would militate against our national interest’.¹⁰⁸ White reiterated the major themes of his extensive report, clearly describing the waste and inept management (from both Asian and Australian officers) he had seen while on tour. Yet he also said he wanted to see the plan continue on a more effective and efficient basis. His subsequent articles, such as ‘Colombo Plan has been partly successful’ and ‘Colombo Plan “waste” unavoidable’, were, he thought, constructive compromises intended to bolster the program rather than scuttle it in favour of a more censorious headline.¹⁰⁹

In 1960, the DEA published White’s booklet, *The seed of freedom: Australia and the Colombo Plan*, the title having been adapted from President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s evocative speech about the ‘seeds of conflict’ to the 1958 meeting of the Consultative Committee in Seattle. Government printers produced a staggering 50,000 copies for the first edition in Australia, with an additional 20,000 sent to Colombo Plan nations throughout Asia.¹¹⁰ In July 1961, a further 30,000 copies were printed.¹¹¹ It might not have been a bestseller, but it was a significant free publication distributed by diplomatic posts. The

culmination of the Australian government's attempt to extract the maximum amount of publicity material from the work submitted by White and Fitzpatrick was a 30-minute documentary entitled *The Builders*, produced by the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit and released in late 1959.¹¹² The film was an important example of the DEA's attempt to manufacture an image of Asia under the Colombo Plan that would resonate with Australian and Asian audiences. The DEA oversaw the production of *The Builders* but granted White considerable discretion over the script and basic storyline. Although the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit had already produced films on Colombo Plan students, such as *Our Neighbour Australia*, *The Builders* came to be something of a flagship public relations document on Australia's relations with Asia.¹¹³ Its significance, for the government at least, was enhanced by the fact that it was a product of a broad set of guidelines governing the content and style of official audio-visual representations of Australia and Asia.

In the mid-1950s senior bureaucrats determined that the objectives of this media policy were to improve Australian relations with other nations, explain national policies, assist in counteracting 'Russia's ... politico-economic drive', help to expand trade and commercial relations, and provide Australian representatives abroad with readily accessible information describing Australia's position on international issues. Specifically, the DEA said films should be of excellent quality (to ensure maximum commercial distribution), avoid the 'squalid aspects of Australian life', and avoid patronising language and slang expressions. Nor were they to encourage Asians to adopt Australian customs. The government hoped that such films would convey the themes of the 'strength and virility' of Australia, the lack of racial discrimination, the importance of private enterprise,

the harshness of the Australian environment and its lack of arable land, the need for cooperative efforts in the Asian region, the 'dignity of labour', and the message that 'Asian countries could also develop to [Australia's] stage'. Where possible, 'the pomp and circumstance of official occasions should be included, since Asians liked this'. The DEA distributed *The Builders* to Asian posts for dubbing into local languages and screening in commercial movie houses and mobile cinemas provided under the Colombo Plan. In Asia, it received a limited, but generally positive, reception. In Australia, commercial television stations and the ABC broadcast the documentary between 1960 and 1961.¹¹⁴

Immediately after the film's release, concern among some Australian diplomats began to trickle back to the DEA. Lionel Wigmore, Australian High Commissioner in Delhi, complained to Murphy of the ANIB that the documentary made little reference to India and paid particular attention to Colombo Plan projects in Pakistan. 'Indians are quick to notice any such disparity', he warned. He then asked if it was possible to provide an alternative version with a greater emphasis on India.¹¹⁵ But pandering to Asian sensitivities had its limits. The ANIB's John Murray quipped:

Imagine the situation if, at some Colombo Plan Conference, an enthusiastic Indian delegate recommended that the Conference should see the very fine film Australia had made about the Colombo Plan ... and the meeting agreed to have a screening. If the Conference was being held in Kuala Lumpur, the film would be provided by our Malayan friends — the version that was made to please the Malaysians! (Crowd noise — exeunt all!)

Avoidance proved the better course. Murray suggested that Wigmore return the print to Australia lest

‘some curious person might whiz it away for screening to the very people you do not want to see it’. While *The Builders* had served its purpose in Asia, he was confident that it would be ‘useful for a long time yet in Australian schools’.¹¹⁶ His comment was apt because the documentary and the story of how it was created said far more about Australia and its attempts to grapple with its place in the region than it did about the collection of nations they called Asia.

The long-term developmental programs created under the auspices of the Colombo Plan were only going to yield benefits for Australia’s security in subtle, ill-defined and inconclusive ways: perhaps more subtle than Casey and the Cold War Planning Committee may have wished. However, the fundamental rationale of the influential 1952 report into the United Kingdom Overseas Information Service still held sway in Australia into the 1960s. Its principal conclusion was that seemingly inconsequential programs and decisions were likely to have consequences far beyond their size: ‘the effect of propaganda on the course of events is never likely to be more than marginal. But in certain circumstances it may be decisive in tipping the balance between diplomatic success and failure’.¹¹⁷ The battle for the mind of Asia was a close contest. A small effort could tip the balance, by influencing a parliamentary committee, or helping to deliver a single vote that might sway a decision in Australia’s favour. Dudley-Clark made this very point to Casey in 1956 when he said success in the Cold War could only come ‘out of a long and patient effort in a hundred minor gains ... it must inevitably be a war of attrition’.¹¹⁸ The impact would be almost impossible to quantify and governments could make only the most

subjective and tentative assessments about the effect of these programs. In official circles, the Cold War was conceived of as a mental battle as much as a strictly political and economic one — a Manichean contest that simply had to be won. Casey saw the battle for hearts and minds as a most serious one, where an Australian propaganda campaign, orchestrated under the rubric of the Colombo Plan, could play a pivotal role.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the Australian government convinced itself that the Colombo Plan, in association with other aid programs, had retarded the effectiveness of communist insurgents. The 1959 ANZUS communiqué 'noted the growing awareness on the part of Asian countries of the threat posed to life and liberty by Communist imperialism'. Ministers believed that economic and social progress would continue to render 'Communist political subversion and sabotage in the area increasingly difficult'. But there remained an ever increasing 'need for other free countries to devote a large share of their resources through ... channels such as the Colombo Plan, for technical and economic development assistance to countries of the area'.¹¹⁹ The fading boundary between non-military and military-aid — although it was always a problematic distinction — continued into the 1960s. With Australia on the brink of armed commitment to Vietnam, the role of the Colombo Plan as a support program for more tangible military goals became even more pronounced. In May 1960, the Acting Minister for External Affairs, Garfield Barwick, authorised a shipment of battery-operated transistor radios to South-East Asian countries, including South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. Unlike the shipment of transmitters made in the mid-1950s, the government publicised this gift. A great problem for the governments of South-East Asia, Barwick said publicly, was

'how best to dispel ignorance and to counter false rumours and propaganda'. Australia's donation would 'assist in the dissemination of information and teaching to school children and villages in remote areas'.¹²⁰ Early in 1964, Australia provided 15 railway carriages to the South Vietnamese government under the Colombo Plan, ostensibly because they would play a role in economic and commercial development. But as Hasluck explained to Cabinet, from a 'strategic point of view' the gift was important for 'the carriage of troops, equipment and military supplies' between Saigon and the northern provinces.¹²¹

The DEA began to develop a more critical appreciation of the problems facing the execution of Australian foreign policy, yet the department's attitude and approach to propaganda in South-East Asia remained essentially unchanged from the early-1950s. Considering the pervasive fear of communist aggression and the primacy of the Menzies Government's defence imperatives, it seemed almost inevitable that the government would use the Colombo Plan to implement paramilitary and counter-subversion operations. In 1961, the Information Branch of the DEA produced an analysis of Australia's propaganda activities in South-East Asia. Among other things, the report reflected on the politicisation of Australian foreign policy. Specifically, it contended that 'the Cold War now extends into nearly every nook and cranny of information activity ... The Cold War has limited our capacity for self-expression and this is a handicap which has to be accepted in information activity as in other fields'.¹²² The response is understandable, given the international and domestic contexts in which these decisions were made. However, it narrowed Australia's perception of what was possible in its engagement with Asia. Casey worked assiduously to develop a workable propaganda strategy, drawing on expertise from across the public service and abroad. The results of the

planning committee he created are difficult to quantify, but more importantly, we can see where the dictates of the Cold War, combined with a rudimentary understanding of Asia and its people, circumscribed the department's imagination and language. This process dominated the department's concept of engagement throughout the decade and would continue to do so for another. That the Cold War ethic was considered a *fait accompli* also encapsulates the reactionary nature of the department's strategy. Naturally, the Colombo Plan and its associated programs, as key features of Australia's involvement in the region, were inexorably caught up in this environment.

The Colombo Plan embodied the growing tension between a coercive intervention, oriented toward short-term objectives, and a constructive, less prescriptive form of engagement. On one hand, it reaffirmed Australian nationalist sentiment, summed up by the widely voiced idea that the Colombo Plan offered a chance 'to show them [Asians] that, in our way of life, there is something worthwhile'.¹²³ Yet it also cast stronger light on Australian isolationism and forced policy-makers to re-examine other policies. From deep inside the bureaucracy, a tentative shift in regional awareness began to take a more influential form. When contemplating the political objectives of the Colombo Plan, Arthur Tange reflected that it was the white Australia policy and a 'history of isolation' that had led to a 'wealth of misunderstanding' between Asia and Australia. And although he thought irreconcilable differences on complex international issues were likely to remain, the Colombo Plan had allowed Asians and Australians to 'mix together in a way which [had] not been otherwise practicable'.¹²⁴ In its most defensive guise, the Colombo Plan aimed to relieve the anxieties associated with living next to Asia, to stimulate resistance to communist subversion, and to reinforce the boundaries between Australia and the region.

Yet the cultural interaction promised by the Colombo Plan was set to challenge and transgress the very barriers the government thought the program would maintain.

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