

When your policy consultant, Dr George Post, wrote to us last month he perhaps rashly expressed pleasure that I would be bringing a "thoughtful message" from the Commonwealth Secretariat. I shall try to match that prescription, though I hope I may be allowed to share some reflections which are more likely to provoke than to soothe. If this is not entirely welcome, may I remind you that the mind is like a parachute: it works best when it is open.

I thought I would take advantage of my four and half years as a Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, first, to give you an idea of how the Commonwealth looks from its engine room in Marlborough House; secondly, to look at its strengths and weaknesses, and in particular to see how far the admirable language in which its principles are clothed is matched by its practice; and finally to offer some thoughts on the threats and opportunities it faces as the 20th Century closes. *Si les francophones entre vous y trouvent des échos de la division de l'analyse en trois plans chère à l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration française, tant mieux!*

As a former British diplomat of some 34 years standing, it was deeply refreshing to join the Secretariat as an international civil servant. One was casting off the world where the "Sir Humphreys" were expected to say "Yes, Minister" (or even "Yes, Prime Minister") at every turn, to plunge into the liberating environment of a multicultural organisation freighted with history, *triumphes et misères*. Since it has been the practice of the Canadian and other Commonwealth Governments to send their finest to work in the Secretariat, I found richly talented colleagues ready to steer me through the shoals of the Commonwealth's economic and social programmes. In my earlier diplomatic life, I had had some acquaintance with international economic relations: indeed I had cut my teeth on Commonwealth business at a Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting in the 1970s at which one Jean Chrétien made his international debut. But I had never been asked to deal directly with the health, education, women's affairs, youth, science and technology or the environment agendas as I encountered in Marlborough House. Not every Commonwealth Government thinks