



Statements and Speeches

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THE COMMONWEALTH – A UNIQUE INSTRUMENT FOR CO-OPERATION

A Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Don Jamieson, at the Royal Commonwealth Society Lunch, London, on December 6, 1978.

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...It is always for me ... a great pleasure to return to London, particularly so when I have the opportunity, as now, to speak to such a distinguished group as the Royal Commonwealth Society. Some weeks ago, when Mr MacDonald and I had the good fortune – at least from my point of view – of spending several hours together travelling to and from Kenya, we discussed the Commonwealth at great length and talked about its future and the impact that it may be able to have on world affairs in general. When he was good enough to invite me to address this distinguished body, I, of course, accepted at once, and I am very pleased that my schedule on this occasion was mutually satisfactory and we were able to arrange this get-together.

That was the easy part of it for me in terms of accepting. What has been, and continues to be, difficult for me is to know precisely what I ought to talk about in relation to the Commonwealth. There is literally an endless number of aspects of Commonwealth relations that deserve in each case rather a detailed examination and that, of course, would be quite impossible given the time constraints and your patience. At the same time, I consulted with my dear old friend and colleague, Paul Martin, who emphasized that it was a family affair and who advised me against a prepared text or any sort of learned discourse on a certain aspect of Commonwealth relations, and said: "Why don't you just give them, as it were, off the top of your head, some of your own personal impressions and some of your own views?" And that, therefore, is what I propose to do. In the meantime, I ought to say, parenthetically, that I hope I can avoid the tired old generalizations and the rather weary platitudes that we have been hearing over the years about the Commonwealth and I may say that I'm a bit of an expert on that subject. It suddenly occurred to me this morning, for the first time in half a century, literally, that my earliest, very first public appearance was when I won an oratorical contest as a young boy, reciting a thing called *Children of the Empire*. And, you know, I dredged up out of history this morning that particular incident and also realized, in recalling a few lines from it, how much things have changed and how important it is for us in these days to understand the distinction between the old British Empire, as we used to call it in those days, and the present Commonwealth of Nations.

I think it is rather unfortunate in some respects that some of the more articulate people on this subject have not yet made that distinction. I have a great sympathy and understanding for their emotional attachment to the past, and I am as great a respecter of history, I think, as anyone present in this room or probably anyone involved in international affairs today, and yet I think it is a real disservice to the potential that exists in the Commonwealth to seek to preserve it or to perceive it as being the kind of instrument that it once was in that distant past (and which, I think we can
