

# COSMOPOLITAN

by STEVAN D. KARON

## ON THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH

Criticism of the British Commonwealth usually falls on deaf ears in Canada. Why this is so is easily seen if one looks at this organization's beginning. It was a creation of British idealists in the early 20th century who dreamed that it would be a "cure all" and bind all British colonies eventually together with the mother-country. Canadians as loyal subjects of the British Crown fell under this spell blindly.

The very nature of the British Commonwealth shows the difficulties it had to face. There was no certain plan this organization was to follow. It is not a military alliance nor an economic one. It is simply an organization for "co-operation". In this vagueness it finds flexibility so say its disciples. They had to adopt this excuse as their original idealistic plans fell through.

The origins of the Commonwealth are hard to trace but the statute of Westminster of 1931 is usually phrased as its birth. In a time when Britain was undergoing a hard post-war depression and the rise of nationalism was meeting it head on, Britain had to give up its older prosperous colonies yet it needed them for its own survival. Therefore a very deceptive plan was dreamed up, to satisfy these two demands.

The older established and internally sovereign former colonies would receive a new name of Dominion hoping thereby to erase the name colony without giving away any power while at the same time binding them into a new "club" under the Crown.

Some people got carried away with this idea and its unrealistic potentials by drawing up plans for a "super" Government of all these Dominions and the mother country. Many similar idealistic plans were drawn up. Each time forgetting the great distances that separated these "colonies" besides "the march of time" which brought with it new members.

*Webster says that "taut" means "tight". I guess I've been taut quite a bit in this university, after all.*

Until 1961, when the number of "new" members outnumbered the older Dominions. Not only that but the "new" members entered under very mild conditions. Some were even Republics such as India and Ghana who did not recognize the Monarchy as the head of their government but only as the traditional head of the Commonwealth. This separated them from the "older" members who had a common link as loyal subjects of the British Crown.

One of the early strikes that tolled the doom of this organization was precipitated by those "new" members who proceeded to evict an older loyal member because of its internal policies. These members were unacquainted with one of the original rights each Dominion had, to rule its own internal affairs. And so the Union of South Africa was ousted. Yet one of these advocates, the Republic of Ghana, makes a

mocking of the free parliamentary system by elevating Dr. Nkrumah to a virtual dictator.

These things can only occur in an organization which is falling apart by its own flexibility. The death blow paradoxically was tolled by the British government itself, the author of this organization. As now with British membership in the Common Market all but signed, Britain will have new allegiances and commitments. In this wake the Commonwealth will become defunct or completely useless as even the British preferentials would be cut.

Viewing this record, which omitted any mention of the Suez crises and the perennial India-Pakistan dispute over the Kashmir area, it is disturbing to see how a Canadian Prime Minister could put so much emphasis in the Commonwealth. Instead of trying to find an organization with a future that will benefit Canada.

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