

to the extent that Commonwealth links and machinery can help resolve these issues or bring about readjustments of various national policies to lessen their dangers, the association can make a valuable contribution. That is why the Commonwealth is today so much more significant as an instrument of world politics than the original rich-man's, white-man's club from which it has been evolved.

The two most significant features of the modern Commonwealth are complementary – first its heterogeneity, the variety of its member countries in terms of their size, location, culture, wealth and basic economy, and secondly the fact that all these members nevertheless share a number of facilities or habits in common. Most important among these are: the ability to use English as a working language, though it is not the mother tongue of the vast majority (there are scores of official languages in Commonwealth countries); many similar habits, working methods, and traditions in administration, in law, and in the organization and ethics of the professions; similarities in educational tradition, especially at the higher levels; and an inherited network of contacts and of habits of consultation and mutual helpfulness. These shared aspects can make consultation much less difficult, and functional co-operation more economical and far more effective, than would otherwise be possible on such an international scale.

The value of any political instrument depends on what it is used for (or can be used for), on how effective it is or can be made, and, perhaps not least, on the by-products of its use.

The direct uses of the Commonwealth have from the beginning been in the fields of consultation and of functional co-operation in selected areas where members agree that such co-operation is feasible and desirable. The chief by-products have, I think, been the broadening of contacts, understanding, horizons and friendships.

These fundamentals have not changed. With increased membership, the consultation has, of course, widened; with diversification of membership among races, continents and economic stages, not only has the subject matter been changed – to more far-reaching if more difficult issues – but the discussions have, in my judgment, deepened. And in recent years the range of fields in which consultation and programs of co-operation take place has expanded dramatically.

Heads of the independent governments of the Commonwealth have been

meeting for informal and wide-ranging consultations since the beginning of this century. They now meet biennially, in various capitals.

Commonwealth finance ministers adopted the habit of annual meetings a quarter-century ago.

Commonwealth education conferences, at ministerial level, began in Oxford in 1958, and have been held since then roughly every three years – in Delhi, Ottawa, Lagos, Canberra and, in 1974, Kingston.

Periodic conferences of Commonwealth ministers of health and of law began in 1965. Health ministers now meet annually for a day or two before the yearly meetings of the World Health Organization Assembly, with longer meetings, lasting about ten days, every three years (Edinburgh 1965, Kampala 1968, Mauritius 1971, and Colombo 1975). Law ministers have met in Sydney (1965), London (1966 and 1973), New Delhi (1971) and Lagos (1974).

Commonwealth meetings are not always – or indeed usually – at ministerial level. The top civil servants of all Commonwealth governments – in some countries this was the cabinet secretary, in others the “permanent” head of the office of the president or prime minister – met in Ottawa in 1972, and have been meeting annually since, on their own, with the Commonwealth Secretary-General in the alternate years between the now biennial heads-of-government meetings, and as a separate committee of the whole during such summit meetings.

Specialized meetings

There are many more specialized meetings at top-official level: for example, regular meetings of the chief statisticians of Commonwealth governments to exchange views, *inter alia*, on techniques and to work out programs of technical assistance to those who need it, and of auditors-general. The heads of the national scientific research organizations of Commonwealth countries meet regularly, and are increasingly focusing on co-operative programs to step up the application of science and technology to economic development and so on.

Nor are Commonwealth meetings all governmental; still less do they all represent the executive branch. Legislators from all over the Commonwealth meet annually under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and there are also regional meetings. There are regular meetings of speakers to exchange experience and ideas, and of

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