

There is no doubt that Canada's dual heritage had a good deal to do with shaping our conception of the Commonwealth. It not only inclined us to look outward, it also gave us a special capacity to help evolve relations which derived their strength from diversity. And that, as it turned out, was to be the nature of the Commonwealth relation.

And so I think it is possible to say that our conception of the Commonwealth proved to be forward looking. It was probably the only conception that could, in the end, have accommodated the non-British peoples of the Commonwealth who today comprise the vast majority of its members. The choice for these countries was not always easy. There were important segments of public opinion in many of them who questioned the wisdom of Commonwealth membership. That they nevertheless opted freely for the Commonwealth, that they saw a balance of merit in that direction, was to be a watershed in the evolution of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth as we know it today -- spanning the continents and lying astride the great divisions of race and wealth in the world -- has its origin in that option.

I should like, at this point, to revert to the matter of definition. Perhaps the closest we can come to a definition of the Commonwealth is to call it a partnership -- a partnership based on a measure of common historical recollection, on a framework of common values and institutions, but above all on a willingness to consult and co-operate on a basis of mutual confidence.

I say "above all" because I frankly think that aspect of our partnership is decisive for the future of the Commonwealth. The common recollection will fade. Some of the ties -- whether of sentiment or self-interest -- which form the basis of our partnership will inevitably weaken in time. We must expect the new countries, in particular, to develop values and institutions that will conform more and more to the special circumstances of their own societies. It is remarkable enough that we should have been able to achieve a form of association which has shown itself capable of accommodating the interests of 21 independent countries, widely distributed over the globe and accounting for nearly one-quarter of the world's population. But if we want to keep our partnership alive and meaningful, we cannot afford to take it for granted. We must strengthen and consolidate existing ties where that is possible. We must move forward to seek out new avenues of co-operation toward common objectives. We must give our partners a continuing stake in the Commonwealth.

Racial partnership is a case in point. Almost a decade ago, The Economist expressed the view that "the outstanding problem of the new Commonwealth, as indeed at longer range of the world at large, is the problem of racial partnership". In the intervening years it has become one of vital urgency. For, if we accept the value of a multi-racial Commonwealth, a Commonwealth in which nations representing different races, cultures and continents are prepared to collaborate in a community of purpose, then surely we cannot afford to leave any doubt as to where the Commonwealth stands on the whole issue of racial pride and prejudice. It is a challenge we have to meet, not only because it is central to our partnership but because the Commonwealth is in a unique position to play a part in enlarging the horizons of racial understanding in the world.