



Statements and Speeches

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THE COMMONWEALTH

An Address by Mr. Marcel Cadieux, Canadian Ambassador to the United States, to the International Relations Club, Seattle, September 20, 1973.

A journalist covering the recent meeting of Commonwealth heads of government in Ottawa complained to Her Majesty the Queen that the name of this strange organization — "Commonwealth" — didn't really convey any idea of its nature or purposes. "Well" Her Majesty observed dryly, "we used to have another name for it." It is perhaps because the Commonwealth is a lineal descendant of the British Empire that many people in the world think of it — if, indeed, they think of it at all — as a British club, with some of the anachronistic quaintness that is the charm of so many of the older clubs of London. Certainly the Commonwealth is widely thought of as a British invention — not least, I suspect, by the British themselves. You may wonder, indeed, why a Canadian ambassador should choose to speak on this subject to an American audience. I certainly do not do so with any feeling that there is still a need to dispel the sort of misconception held 20 years ago by a Congressman from Chicago who proposed that the United States "accept" Canada from Britain in return for writing off British war debts!

I do think that the Commonwealth is worth taking a look at as a unique international association, the 32 members of which include the world's second-largest nation, India, and many of the smallest, rich and developed nations as well as poor and growing ones, nations with many systems of government, alliances and perspectives, different interests and problems. One may wonder, indeed, what on earth this heterogeneous collection of independent states located in every continent of the world can possibly have in common.

Historically, of course, the origins of the Commonwealth are in the British Empire, even if the evolution was by no means inevitable or even logical. Other colonies have developed into independent states without continuing any similar association among themselves and with their former rulers, although it is perhaps not too far-fetched to see in the recent encouragement by France of La Francophonie as an international community a realization of the value of such associations. Another unifying factor almost too obvious to be mentioned is, of course, a common language. The recent conference in Ottawa is surely one of the few world meetings to span so wide an
