

Commonwealth Conference

up this matter myself at the trade and economic conference in Montreal in September of 1958. Two educational conferences were held during our period of office. Another is about to take place in Ottawa in the month of August. All these things are beneficial. All of them, as the Prime Minister showed today, are being expanded, are being altered by being enlarged.

I think one of the benefits of regular meetings of the prime ministers' conference is that instead of going from precedent to precedent, as Tennyson described the British constitutional course, the prime ministers' conference goes from declaration to declaration, ever adding strength and variety to the concept of the commonwealth and ever, in the Prime Minister's concluding words, strengthening that family of nations which defies definition but which in essence represents the greatest body in the world today, which brings together men and women of all races, colours and religions in peaceful association. Indeed, whatever the difficulties between India and Pakistan are and have been over Kashmir, whatever problems have arisen between various countries of the commonwealth, never has there been a suggestion that the peace of the world would in any way be interfered with by these differing countries. This is a tribute that the commonwealth has earned by the informality of its relationship.

The proposal for the expansion of development projects is one that I am sure will command the support of members generally in the house. I suggest that in the future there should not be an interval of well on to two years between prime ministers' conferences. I think it is most necessary that it should meet annually, for the length of the communiqué indicates that a vast variety of subjects was considered. Instead of waiting for the accumulation of problems, I believe that if there were regular annual meetings the spirit of good feeling, of co-operation, of frankness to which the Prime Minister alluded would add further strength to the commonwealth relationship.

I realize the difficulties, but as I have said before I should like to see a rotation of the meetings of the prime ministers' conference in various parts of the commonwealth. By rotation I do not mean each following the other, for I feel that most of the meetings should be held in London, but occasionally it would be the course of wisdom to have some of these meetings held in other capitals of the commonwealth.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

I conclude by referring to one other matter, the informality of prime ministers' meetings. There are 18 members now. When I first attended the prime ministers' conference I believe the number was 11. We were very close. As the membership expanded that closeness, that clubbiness, if I may adopt the expression used by the Prime Minister in describing it as a club although not accepting that definition or description, seemed to be in danger of being lost. He has told us that the fears expressed in this regard in 1960 and 1961 have proved to be without basis.

We faced a very great problem in 1961 when for the first time the coloured races of the commonwealth had the majority. As I saw the situation, if the commonwealth prime ministers' conference had had a vote forced on it to determine our attitude to apartheid, to declare our support for non-discrimination, the commonwealth might well have foundered there. To have a vote at these conferences would destroy them, for no nation within the commonwealth would accept the determination of its policies on the basis of the majority opinion of the commonwealth membership. As I saw it, we came close to a vote in 1961.

I took a stand against discrimination that was widely criticized at the time. I believe that stand on behalf of Canada made its contribution to the strengthening of the commonwealth. I believe that the conference just ended will add to the strength of the commonwealth relationship, and I express to the Prime Minister my thanks and the thanks of the opposition for representing Canada as he did. When the prime minister of Canada speaks at the commonwealth conference he speaks for Canada. Therefore we must always endeavour so to speak at these conferences as to be able to have the almost unanimous support of Canadians. In what he said and did at the conference he followed the course taken when I had the honour to be prime minister, namely of trying at all times to do our respective parts, to speak for Canada within the commonwealth, to speak in accents authentic, strong and, above all, reasonable. I express my thanks to him for the remarks he has made today.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, the members of this party join with members in all parts of the house in extending a very sincere welcome to the Prime Minister and saying how pleased we are to see him back and in such good spirits after a very strenuous conference of the com-