

Some observers, in desperation no doubt for a more accurate definition, have described the Commonwealth as a club. And there may be something in this though there is certainly no taint of exclusion or exclusiveness about us. At any rate since I have been in Washington particularly I have been impressed by the natural easy relationship which we seven Commonwealth Ambassadors have with one another. It is a relationship of complete equality and special intimacy which enables us, I think, to discuss with special frankness and candour our differences as well as our agreements. When one realizes that in all the great capitals of the world such special club facilities exist, one may imagine how useful such a network of association may be, not only for our own interests, but for the interests which we share with the rest of the free world.

Because of these things, the governments of the Commonwealth have developed habits and means of contact and consultation, particularly in foreign affairs. These have certainly been most useful to us, the younger nations of the Commonwealth, as our own diplomatic services have expanded, as our contacts with the outside world have become more complicated and as the issues of war and peace have come closer to our comprehension and more immediate to our interest. Such contacts and such consultation go on in and between the various capitals, by correspondence and by word of mouth. The periodic meetings of Prime Ministers, such as that which has but recently taken place, are merely one high means of exchanging views upon issues which concern us all. There are many others on less exalted planes. Although such consultations rarely result in anything approaching common policies, there can be no doubt that the effect of this friendly confrontation of differing interests and viewpoints helps us all to avoid extremes and to make fuller allowance for the attitudes to our friends.

The sun never set upon the old British Empire. It shines equally upon the nations of the modern Commonwealth. Our partnership is one which, unlike any other, spans the dangerous territory between West and East. So it is that one of the most valuable assets which we have is our link with Asia. The Republic of India, which alone can compete with Communist China for the leadership of the millions of Asia, remains our valued friend and partner within this loose society. So do those other young nations of the great sub-continent, Pakistan and Ceylon. Some of us may differ from the Government of India or the Government of South Africa, let us say - one would hardly expect our attitudes to be the same on all subjects - but we respect their right to their own viewpoint and to determine their own policies. And we discuss our differences pretty frankly and, I think, have some useful influence on one another. Surely the special entrée to Asia for example on the plane of equality and respect and friendship is a strength not only to the nations of the Commonwealth, but to the whole alliance of the free.

This Commonwealth of Nations is a political phenomenon which fits into no category and defies precise definition. It is governed, not from one capital, but