

No Longer a Compact Association

The Commonwealth today is a far cry from the compact association of a few years ago. However, Mr. Speaker, I think it is a more representative reflection of the world in which we live today and of mankind as a whole than anything we have known in the past. The change in the Commonwealth is perhaps more noticeable because of the character of the increase rather than the extent of the increase. The new members have come from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia and because of the nature of the new membership, as well as its number, the search for a common denominator of agreement on policy and attitudes and like-mindedness, if you wish to put it that way, I suspect, is more difficult than used to be.

But, to the extent that this can be achieved, the result is more important today, I believe, than it has ever been in the past, more meaningful in terms of the world in which we live. I think everyone who took part in the meetings was deeply impressed, and in some cases surprised, at the extent to which all 18 delegations sought to find value in this association and sought to strengthen it, irrespective of their background and past history - sought to use it for constructive purposes which could help move the world forward toward the resolution of some of its most difficult problems.

Another noteworthy feature is the fact that the expanded membership has not resulted in a dilution of the intimacy of relationship in contact and discussion which one might have expected following this kind of increase. With such a large membership representing such a wide range of interests, viewpoints and indeed, emotions, one might have expected to find a dilution of the informality and the intimacy of the discussions which used to take place at Commonwealth meetings. Fortunately this does not seem to have happened. I think the Conference of last week and this week may go down as one of the vitally important stages in the evolution of Commonwealth affairs. It is too early, of course, to state with confidence that this will be the case; it depends on what the various leaders who met and conferred together are able to do during the weeks, the months and the years ahead to carry out the substantial measure of agreement which was achieved in London. But I believe the potentiality for a great step forward by the new Commonwealth is there.

Relations Between West and East

As the communiqué indicates -- and I am talking now about the first item on the agenda, which is the usual discussion of the state of world affairs generally -- there was general agreement that the reduction of East-West tensions which has occurred has helped to produce solutions to some of the most serious threats to international peace in recent years, and that it at least provides an opportunity to work out some of the problems which remain dangerous and worrisome. At the same time there was general recognition that the competition between the free and the Communist worlds remains a dominant factor in international affairs. Where once this was seen most sharply in the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the Western countries, it emerges now in subtler forms, with competition on the continent of Africa for influence among the peoples of the new countries both within and outside the Commonwealth. It emerges, too, in the relentless pressure of aggression and subversion in Southeast Asia.