

The perennial question concerning the Commonwealth is the basic one: What is it? André Ouellet, now Canada's Postmaster General, attacked the problem directly when he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Here is an excerpt from a cogent address which he made at the University of Manitoba:

"Defined in positive terms, and drawing on the declaration issued at Singapore, the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 32 sovereign independent nations, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace. There are members from each of the six continents and from five oceans; the member countries comprise peoples of widely different races, languages, religions and cultures, embracing between a quarter and a third of the world's population. Members

## What The Commonwealth Is

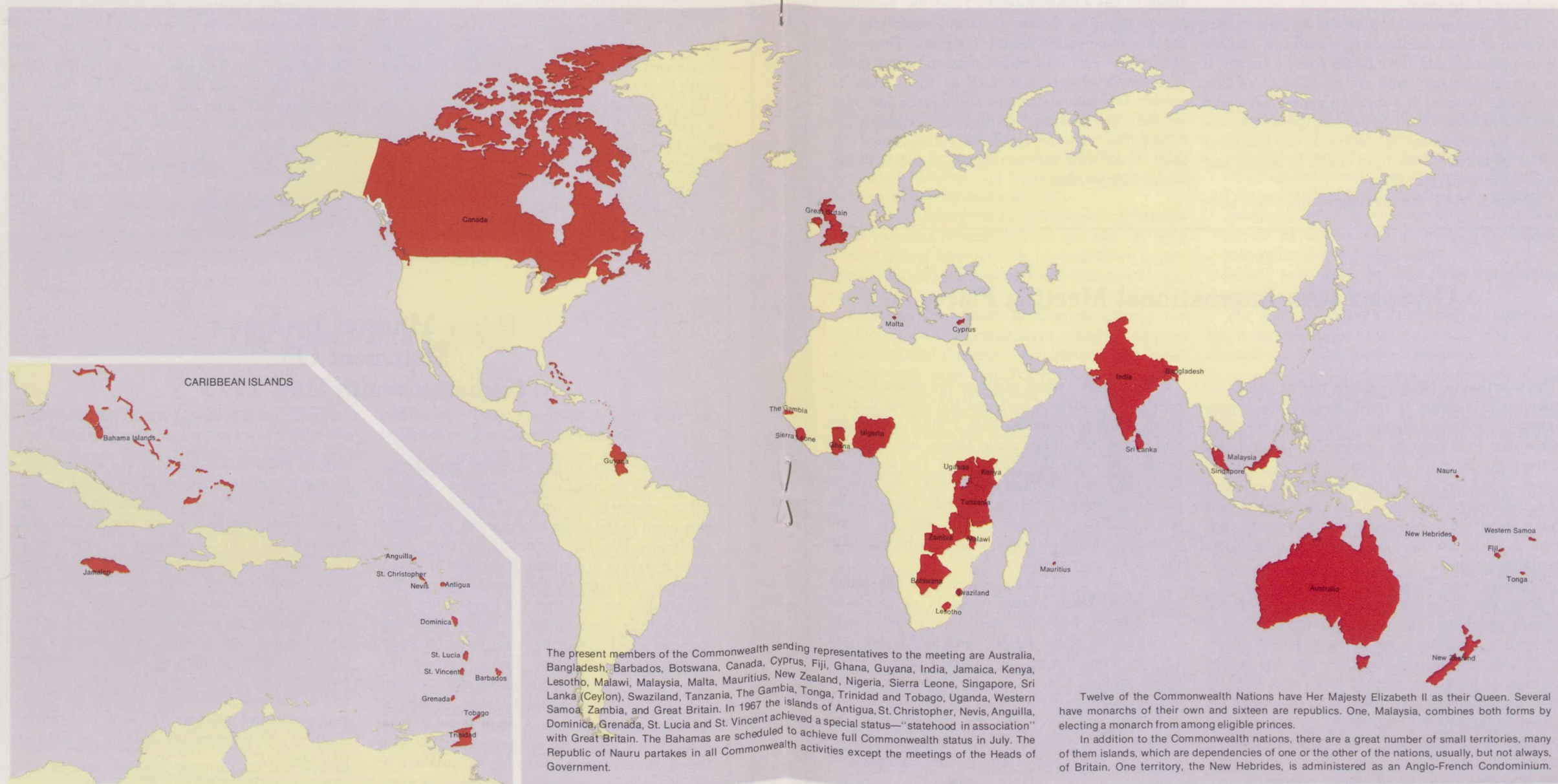
[AND WHAT THE COMMONWEALTH IS NOT]

have complete freedom to belong to any other grouping, association or alliance or to be non-aligned. They range from poor developing countries to wealthy industrialized nations like Britain, Canada and Australia. With the exception of Britain, they share a common history as former British colonies, which have now become sovereign, independent nations. At the government level, they still share a common language—English, though most of them are multilingual plural societies, embracing more than one cultural group. Their administrative systems are broadly similar, owing much to their having been former British colonies, though generally administrative practices and pro-

cedures have been adapted to meet local requirements or the peculiar circumstances of their history and culture. Throughout much of the Commonwealth, legal systems are still extensively based on the British common law, though here again there are variations to meet particular circumstances as, for example, in the Province of Quebec, where the Civil Code is derived from the French legal system. Also, in many parts of the Commonwealth, particularly among the newer members in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, education still owes much to the British influence and tradition, though here again the pattern is changing rapidly.

"But perhaps even more important than shared

colonial experience, a common language, similar systems of government administration, law, and education is the strong tradition of consultation and co-operation derived from historical experience, which amounts to a sense of neighbourliness. Indeed, one authority has described the Commonwealth as a 'unique experiment in international living.' Two thousand years ago, one young Jew asked another: 'Who is my neighbour?' The response, instead of a definition, was the story of the Good Samaritan, and the reformulation of the question into 'Who was more neighbourly?' Throughout the ages this question has transformed and inspired new patterns of behaviour and institutions. While neighbourhood itself is merely a fact governed by physical location, good-neighbourliness is a moral and political achievement of the highest order. In the present age . . . good-neighbourliness is becoming more and more essential."



The present members of the Commonwealth sending representatives to the meeting are Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji, Ghana, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Swaziland, Tanzania, The Gambia, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Western Samoa, Zambia, and Great Britain. In 1967 the islands of Antigua, St. Christopher, Nevis, Anguilla, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent achieved a special status—"statehood in association" with Great Britain. The Bahamas are scheduled to achieve full Commonwealth status in July. The Republic of Nauru partakes in all Commonwealth activities except the meetings of the Heads of Government.

Twelve of the Commonwealth Nations have Her Majesty Elizabeth II as their Queen. Several have monarchs of their own and sixteen are republics. One, Malaysia, combines both forms by electing a monarch from among eligible princes.

In addition to the Commonwealth nations, there are a great number of small territories, many of them islands, which are dependencies of one or the other of the nations, usually, but not always, of Britain. One territory, the New Hebrides, is administered as an Anglo-French Condominium.