

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 procedures 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 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 British influence and tradition, though here again the pattern is changing rapidly.

But perhaps even more important than shared colonial experiences, 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 questions 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 of rapidly-developing technology and increasing interdependence, where one's acts today may affect one's neighbour's welfare tomorrow, good-neighbourliness is becoming more and more essential.

Canada's Contribution to the Development of the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth is not, of course, a static organism; it has developed by a slow evolutionary process, which is still going on. What part has Canada played in the development of this unique association?

In my view, Canada's role in this historical process has been more significant than is generally realized. In the interests of a balanced perspective, I should like to recall for you briefly certain important contributions that Canada has made to this on-going evolutionary process. Because some of these developments occurred more than half-a-century ago, they tend to be overlooked.

Canada's first and major contribution to the evolution of the Commonwealth was achieved over the period 1867-1939 as this country gradually came to assume more and more responsibility for foreign policy and for defence. Out of the pressures, strains, persuasion, and dialogue with Britain up to the Versailles Peace Conference at the end of the First World War, and subsequently in the Twenties and Thirties, Canada succeeded in asserting its independence from the Imperial power by a series of agreements and precedents which in turn became the basis for further political development. This process, worked out over seven decades, had tremendous implications. In a very real sense, it set a pattern for political development between Britain and other