

that there is no good evidence that in present circumstances the strength of the Commonwealth would be increased by the existence of more elaborate central machinery than is now the case.

When we come to consider the practical ways in which Commonwealth action may be effective in the contemporary world, I think we must put first on our list the usefulness of this instrument as a means of clearing the political ground easily and informally amongst the group of nations which make up the association. This applies both to questions which arise within the Commonwealth and also to broader international questions which affect all Commonwealth members. This is possible largely, I think, because of the habits and techniques of consultation which over the years have grown up amongst Commonwealth members. It takes place at all levels. It may sometimes amount to no more than casual conversations amongst official members of delegations at international conferences. It may on other occasions be embodied in a formal meeting of the Foreign Ministers or even Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth countries. I do not think we should underestimate the importance in international affairs of the habits of consultation to which I have referred. If a group of men are sitting about a table discussing some problem in international affairs, their discussions are likely to be much more fruitful if each is confident that they all fully understand the character and quality of their meeting - if each knows what weight to give to each other's expression of views - if each can put ideas forward and withdraw them easily and without embarrassment - if they can on occasion consult each other simply as a group of individuals, detaching themselves for the moment from their national policies in a way which it is often extremely difficult to do in discussions amongst members of various governments or various government services. It is not often realized how much discussion of this nature goes forward amongst Commonwealth members, because for the most part it is completely informal, it is not announced, there is no statement of conclusions. There are not, in fact, many occasions on which it is possible to announce formal conclusions of any great substance. The discussions are, however, no less valuable for this reason. It seems to me that no one attending one of these discussions can help being influenced by them, on no matter what level he may be in his particular service, even though he does not enter into a single commitment of any kind in the course of the meeting. His judgment on the circumstances which are under discussion will almost certainly be influenced by what he has heard about the views of other Commonwealth countries. During the meetings he will, if possible, have tried to define some common area upon which all Commonwealth countries can agree. If that is not possible, he will almost certainly so conduct himself after the meetings that, in the knowledge which he has gained of the position of others he will do as little as possible to complicate that position.

Another area in which it seems to me that the Commonwealth will prove to be a useful instrument in the contemporary world is in regard to the complicated and delicate question of relations between Eastern Asia and the Southwest Pacific on the one hand and North America and Western Europe on the other. I do not think it is possible to overestimate the importance of this relationship. During the 19th Century it was by and large a colonial relationship, either directly, in a political sense, or indirectly in an economic sense. Events of the last 50 years, however, have made the continuance of that colonial relationship impossible, even if anyone wanted to continue it. The peoples of Asia and the Southwest Pacific are starting off on a new course, and no one is sure what direction they will take. They are at the moment for the most part directed by people whose training and experience has been gained in association with the countries of North America and Western Europe. The statesmen, the public servants, the industrial and financial leaders, the scholars and teachers of many of the new democracies of the East, are familiar with our political system and with the political and social values which underlie our civilization. They are, moreover, prepared to maintain these values as best they can, and they are committed to the principle that, if possible, they will establish and develop a democratic society. This will by no means be easy for them and it might even be that the orderly progress towards freedom which they have been making will be