

*Report on Commonwealth Conference*

I would be the last to say that everything was achieved that I would have desired. I do not contend that in so far as the communique is concerned it can convey the full nature and substance of the deliberations that took place. On occasions in the past I have heard my predecessors, Right Hon. Mackenzie King and Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent, report on conferences they had attended. In every case it was made perfectly clear that while no decisions were made or can be made in these informal circumstances, there is a oneness of mind that comes about through the exchange of ideas.

There was no disposition on the part of any of the representatives to evade this issue, and there was no lack of frankness in private and informal discussions. I underline the fact that, as the Leader of the Opposition knows very well from his own experience, only in unanimity can there be a final communique issued. Everything that is included therein represents the agreement of all. To bring together the representatives of one quarter of the world's population, belonging to many races and being of many colours, I think it is quite an unusual result that several conclusions were arrived at unanimously which cannot but result in the possibility of change along the lines generally desired.

Despite the profound differences which prevailed and persisted throughout, it was possible for a communique to be issued. This was difficult with two inherently conflicting elements to be reconciled. First, it had become essential that a way be found for commonwealth governments to make clear their intentions on this central question of racial relations. Second, it was desirable that this should be done without violation of the traditional practice of these meetings that the internal affairs of member countries are not the subject of formal discussion. I believe now more certainly than I did when I spoke here on April 27 that any departure from this last principle would mean the end of the commonwealth as we know it; because if we ever arrive at the point where we will discuss the internal affairs of other countries and determine the course by a majority, then there will be problems that will arise and it could only mean that several countries in the commonwealth could not accept the decisions of the majority. I need not go into particulars in that regard; I think a number would come to mind immediately, including the question of migration.

Personally, as the house knows, I was of those who thought it worth while to try

to achieve the first objective of enabling the views of prime ministers to be expressed without sacrificing the principle of non-interference, which is one of the elements of the commonwealth association. I took the view that notwithstanding the depth of feeling on this racial issue—my views throughout the years and now are a matter of record—I believed it would be wrong and damaging to the spirit and fabric of the commonwealth partnership if a majority of the commonwealth governments, finding themselves allied in condemnation of one or more of their number, were to constitute themselves as a court of judgment. I saw, as I said a moment ago, in that trend an end of the association as we know it. The seed of mutual recrimination would threaten the partnership whose essence has always been tolerance, restraint and free co-operation.

I wish that hon. members could have been there. Strong feelings were held in the informal meetings. Men like the president of Pakistan, the prime ministers of India, of Malaya and of Ghana accepted this view as essential to the preservation and maintenance of our relationship. There was unanimous acceptance of the principle that internal affairs of free states are not to be the subject of formal discussion, and that any action in that regard would damage the strength and ultimately the preservation of the institution itself.

I cannot reveal, as hon. members know, in the tradition of those meetings, the substance of the talks. They were at times bilateral, at times in small groups, and at other times all the representatives took part in an informal and private exchange of views. For my part, I had two lengthy and private personal conversations with Mr. Louw; I participated in other informal discussions. I left Mr. Louw in no doubt that in Canada there is no sympathy for policies of racial discrimination, on whatever grounds they may be explained, and that such policies are basically incompatible with the multiracial nature of the commonwealth association. I made it clear to him that the policy of South Africa was a denial of the principle that human dignity and the worth of the individual, whatever his race and colour, must be respected, and that there could be no doubt as to our views in that connection. Indeed, those views are being generally expressed now.

A few weeks ago there were those who felt that what we required was condemnation by various parliaments. I think the events during the days of the conference were an answer to that contention. Our views, the views of all of us in other parts of the commonwealth, or most of the people in