

II. The Commonwealth

Commonwealth Relations

The Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs, which took place in Colombo January 9 to 14, 1950, established several precedents. It was the first conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers. It was also the first meeting of Commonwealth ministers on Asian soil, which, in itself, reflects the increasing importance of Asian affairs.

Outstanding among the recommendations to governments arising from the Conference was that to establish a Commonwealth Consultative Committee for South and South-East Asia to study the possibilities of furthering economic development in that region. With the exception of South Africa, which expressed its sympathy with such a programme but indicated its primary interest in African development, all Commonwealth governments accepted the recommendations of the Colombo meeting and were represented at further discussions held in Sydney in May. As a result of the Sydney meeting, participating governments, including Canada, have agreed to supply funds up to a maximum of £8 million over a three year period to provide technical assistance to under-developed countries in South and South-East Asia. This programme is designed primarily to increase the supply of skilled manpower in that area and is being co-ordinated with similar work carried on by the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies. With other participating governments, Canada has approved the adoption of a draft constitution for a Council for Technical Co-operation. The Council will work through a Technical Co-operation Bureau with headquarters in Colombo.

A meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Committee in London in October resulted in a report setting out in detail development programmes for Ceylon, India, Pakistan, Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak. This report, known as the "Colombo Plan for the Co-operative Economic Development of South and South-East Asia", is a comprehensive programme for the capital development of the area concerned. The Technical Co-operation programme would be closely co-ordinated with any development scheme, although in its organization and work it is a distinct and independent entity. Following an invitation extended after the Sydney meeting, a number of non-Commonwealth nations in South-East Asia indicated an interest in the plan and were represented at the London meeting either by delegates or observers, although they have not yet submitted development programmes of their own.

When referring in the House of Commons to the Colombo meeting, the Secretary of State for External Affairs emphasized the importance of the