

II Multilateral Activities

The Commonwealth

For the Commonwealth 1976 was filled with change. During his first full year as the head of the Secretariat in London, Secretary-General Ramphal tackled in an imaginative fashion the job of expanding the scope of Commonwealth activity in international affairs. In the past the Commonwealth demonstrated a remarkable flexibility in adapting itself to the pressing needs of its widened membership of 36. Now more than ever, it is possible to speak of a "new Commonwealth" with a common heritage dating from the British Empire, whose operating principles of consultation and co-operation are, however, based on equality, understanding and mutual respect. The Commonwealth family contains over 935 million members of diverse races, languages and cultures and, as Prime Minister Trudeau put it at the heads-of-government meeting in Ottawa in 1973, it is Canada's "window on the world".

During 1976 Canada, with its Commonwealth partners, followed attentively developments in Southern Africa. A measure of the Commonwealth's collective concern was the support given by the Secretariat to the Zimbabwe African nationalist delegations at Geneva, and to black Rhodesians, through the Special Commonwealth Program for Rhodesians. Another major problem that received careful examination by the Commonwealth was the international economic situation and the need for international economic reform.

Senior officials' meeting

As one of the years intervening between biennial heads-of-government meetings, 1976 permitted the further implementation of the recommendations of the last meeting of Commonwealth leaders in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1975. To ensure continuity in high-level consultations among Commonwealth members, senior officials (cabinet secretaries) met in Canberra from May 26 to 28 to discuss possible Commonwealth activity in promoting industrial development and co-operation among member countries. They welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal for the appointment of a team of industrial specialists from

several Commonwealth countries to recommend specific proposals for expanding the industrial sectors of member countries. Subsequently, Canada nominated an industrialist as its representative on the Commonwealth Expert Group on Industrial Co-operation. The senior officials also examined the situation in Southern Africa and reaffirmed the hope of all Commonwealth members that a transition to majority rule in Rhodesia could be effected quickly, peacefully and irreversibly. Following a Canadian initiative at Kingston in 1975, they also confirmed that Commonwealth Day would be observed simultaneously in the 36 Commonwealth countries on the second Monday of March, starting in 1977.

Finance ministers' meeting

The annual meeting of Commonwealth finance ministers took place September 30 to October 1 in Hong Kong, where the ministers exchanged views on the problems of international economic affairs. They took special note of the increasingly grave problems of debt and balance-of-payments deficits that affected energy-importing countries and agreed that "... devising effective arrangements to assist developing countries to achieve a sustained rate of growth and to provide for at least minimum needs of all their peoples remained the most pressing task". They expressed concern at the problems facing many countries in their struggle for economic growth and called for a new determination in the wealthier countries to give the developing countries access to their resources and their markets.

The finance ministers welcomed the document entitled *Further Report — Towards A New International Economic Order*, prepared by the Commonwealth Experts' Group (the McIntyre Group), which had already been circulated at UNCTAD IV in Nairobi. The experts' report, which called for urgent action to mitigate the plight of poor countries while the international community sought more basic international reform, was given general endorsement by the ministers, who further agreed that its proposals should be given "... due consideration in framing national and