

The cynical student of history would maintain that the Commonwealth concept is little more than the smile that remained after Alice's Cheshire cat had disappeared. He would argue that the Commonwealth is nothing more than an old boys' club which meets periodically with little more to do than join voices in a nostalgic chorus of Auld Lang Syne. What is the Commonwealth, he asks in exasperation, if it has no overriding sovereignty, if it has no formal pacts or treaties holding it together, or if it has no permanent and centralized machinery. How can such an ephemeral concept mean anything to anyone other than its own members?

Political relations in their subtler forms do not always reveal themselves to such out-and-dried forms of analysis. To the observer who sees a formal document and a set of rules as the only modus operandi in international affairs, the nature of the Commonwealth relationship must indeed be mysterious.

Intangible though our Commonwealth attitudes may be, they can be - they are - of enormous importance in the world in which we live. They are important because they can and do bring people closer together in the pursuit of objectives, the achievement of which are significant not only to themselves but to others. As an example of Commonwealth co-operation for the strengthening of the entire free world I need only draw your attention to the trade and economic conference of Commonwealth Nations which concluded its deliberations in Montreal only last week.

I would repeat that this face of the triangle, not only geometrically, but socially, economically and politically, directly bears on its base, which is Canada-United States co-operation. Indeed, to be effective, many of the courses of action which were suggested by Commonwealth leaders will require and result in a strengthening of our interdependence.

It is not surprising that the idea of interdependence should have been a general concept at a conference, the theme of which was expressed in the following words: "an expanding Commonwealth in an expanding world economy." From this theme it is not difficult to deduce that the spirit in which the deliberations were held was outgoing rather than introspective. Inclusive rather than exclusive, comprehensive rather than restrictive. If the purpose of the conference was to strengthen the Commonwealth association, it was not against others but in co-operation with others. Prosperity cannot be isolated. Economic welfare and stability cannot be walled off into neat compartments. For the Commonwealth to have any meaning and validity in an economic context, it must be as part of the free world. Measures designed to promote prosperity must have a relevance for Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth nations alike - for the United States, for Latin America and beyond.