

Clearly, as countries have emerged, as they have wished to identify more clearly their own character, their own sense of national purpose, they have had to, of necessity, re-examine some of their old relationships. There have always been elements within the various countries of the Commonwealth that have had a dubious linkage with, for example, the origins of the Commonwealth, and so, therefore, it has been for me and for those who share the same kind of views, a difficult task, but it is one that is worth persisting in.

I believe that today it is probably, in the words of Charles Dickens, "the best of times" and "the worst of times" insofar as the Commonwealth is concerned. It is the best of times in the context that there are more opportunities now for this unique grouping of people to come together in support of worth-while endeavours around the world; it is the worst of times for many of the reasons I recited a few moments ago, namely, that there are so many conflicting cross-currents at play, and it is exceedingly difficult for the Commonwealth to find its particular niche.

I think one of the dangers for us as a Commonwealth is that we try to be all things to all people, or that we try as a Commonwealth organization to spread ourselves so thinly in every conceivable kind of trouble spot, in every conceivable kind of difficult situation, that we fail to have any impact anywhere, and therefore I have been arguing in Commonwealth councils for some time that the most important thing for us to do is to ask in the first instance: What the levers, in the most appropriate sense of that word, that the Commonwealth possesses? What are those powers, the influences which are identifiable and which then can be honed and sharpened to apply to particular problems? So once we know what we are, once we know what our strengths are, we can then, looking at the panoply really, of difficult areas, ask ourselves which of those is an area in which our talents can be most useful and most effective. Insofar as what our powers are, I think some of them at least can be stated quite simply.

There is unquestionably a communality of interest within the Commonwealth. It is not something that is easy to describe. Indeed, I once said to a group of my colleagues from the Caribbean that we ought not to spend too much time analyzing the Commonwealth, because in some respects it is a very, very, kind of, nebulous concept. If you really start to spell it out and ask yourself what it is that is holding all of these countries in this relationship and many hundreds of millions of people in this relationship, you start to get into the specifics of it, it is extremely difficult to understand why it has survived for so long. But there are certain things about its character that I think we can state with certain specificity and one of those is of course that we do in a way stem from the same kind of origins. I think the traditions, the