

*Commonwealth Conference*

The Prime Minister has placed before the house something of the atmosphere of these conferences. He spoke of the representation of various races and colours, of the representation of four or five of the world's greatest religions. Sitting around that table there were men who were extremists in their day. Their extremism in the light of subsequent events became a virtue as they led their countries first to freedom and then to membership within the commonwealth, the greatest tribute they could pay to that institution. As I listened to the Prime Minister I could only detect an admiration on his part for the commonwealth and all it stands for. That represents the viewpoint of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, and has during the years. It is a commonwealth without organization, without centralized machinery, anomalous because it has no authority. But, strangely enough, it works.

When the right hon. gentleman spoke of various prime ministers I thought of one, Dr. Banda. I saw him during one of the conferences when he was in London. We chatted together for a while, and finally he had to leave. I asked him his destination. He said "I am going to the palace". Two weeks earlier he had been released from custody. That has been the course of many who were sitting around that table; men who were prosecuted for fighting the battles of extremism are now united in that bond which knows no description.

The commonwealth represents all types of government except communist. I am one of those who believe that the commonwealth can and will encompass all the various forms of government, but I do not see the day when it will ever accept a communist nation as a member. The Prime Minister has referred to the secretariat which was recommended. It is a far cry from some of the views he expressed in the past; it is a still farther cry from the views expressed by Mr. Mackenzie King, who feared anything of this kind as a modern prototype of the family compact of 1835, 1836 and 1837. But changes take place in thinking. I recall on one occasion mentioning something of this kind in one of the conferences, and the general feeling was that the time was not appropriate.

The Prime Minister said timing is so important, and in that he is right. The change in a few years in this regard, brought about in consequence particularly of the requests of the African members of the commonwealth, is indicative of one characteristic which one

sees everywhere among the coloured races of the commonwealth. When they were in a colonial status the United Kingdom represented the antithesis of all that was reasonable and responsible; it was subjected to the most extreme tirades of condemnation. But with the passing years and the attainment of independence, that criticism has almost been obliterated and in its place has come admiration for the great contribution Britain has made to the elevation of standards and to the advancement and enhancement of freedom everywhere in the world.

I recall so well, and the Prime Minister referred to this, that at one or two conferences I advocated a declaration of commonwealth rights. I realized the difficulties in the way of such a declaration. Representatives were present from governments of all types and varieties, as I said a moment ago, some of them not having the parliamentary system that we have, others not accepting the Queen as part of their constitutional systems save in her designation as head of the commonwealth.

There is one thing that has represented my view over the years, and it is unchanged now. It is that this commonwealth cannot survive unless it is colour blind, with five of every six people in its population belonging to a coloured race. I contended that discrimination by any nation within the commonwealth as a principle of government was inconsistent with membership in the commonwealth. This was generally accepted in 1961, and I quote in summary what I said in the house at that time.

We were opposed to racial discrimination and made it clear I could not approve any formula or solution which did not maintain beyond any doubt that non-discrimination in respect of race and colour is an essential principle of the commonwealth association. This was not a stand which was taken then and not before; I have followed that course over the years. All but the prime minister of South Africa were in agreement that no expression of consent to South Africa's continuing membership was possible without an expression of the strongest views on their part regarding apartheid.

Those views expressed then by me were regarded as extremism. Those views, that were then considered as heresy by some, have today become orthodoxy. In the communiqué there is a declaration that once and for all represents the acceptance by all the members of the commonwealth of this abiding principle. In the present communiqué these words appear:

The commonwealth has a particular role to play in the search for solutions to the interracial problems which are threatening the orderly development of mankind in general—