

for anyone to play to. It enabled the heads of government to have more direct, frank and spontaneous communication with one another.

Another primary reason for the success of the conference was that finally it seems to have been accepted that the modern Commonwealth does not revolve around Britain, even though that country, which was once the imperial power, will always have a special place that cannot be filled by any other country. However, while this new maturity of the Commonwealth has been recognized at the top, there is still a task to be accomplished in persuading political figures, officials and editorialists in the member countries not to identify their relations with Britain with their relations with the Commonwealth.

As the Ottawa conference developed, Britain became accepted more and more as an equal member. This meant that the heads of government were able to deal with real problems and not the old emotional battles that had so often prevented them from getting a constructive grip on substantive issues.

There was some talk before the conference and at the time that the vacant space at the hub of the Commonwealth might be occupied by Canada. I think it was clear at the conference not only that Canada does not seek such a role but that such a position would be wholly contrary to our conception of the Commonwealth as a body of equals. There is, after all, nothing like it anywhere in the world. At the United Nations there is an institutional distinction between the great powers and the others. There is no other precedent in the world for so many heads of state to gather together periodically to discuss informally and directly their common problems and objectives. When I addressed the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September, I made the point that too often the formal voting process leads to barren and abrasive confrontation. I suggested that consensus – the technique increasingly used at Commonwealth heads of government meetings – was frequently a more effective method.

I have not discussed the many other features of the Commonwealth that make it such a flexible and valuable instrument. I am sure that the growing achievements of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, the Commonwealth Foundation, those of co-operation in youth and education and so many other fields are well known to you. And it is for this reason that I have concentrated in these brief remarks on the new maturity of the

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