

There were difficulties to challenge the breadth of vision, the human tolerance, the material generosity and the inventive genius of the original members. Some said that racial differences would prove insurmountable. It was doubted that an acceptable formula could be found by which the different Commonwealth nations could be related to the Crown.

Others feared that the new Asian and African nations, with their history of occupation rather than colonization, would be carried away by the winds of freedom, unwilling or unable to remain in close partnership with the original members, and especially Britain. The attitude of the new nations to both Crown and Commonwealth was bound to differ from that of the members whom they came to join. The Commonwealth would never be the same again, for new strands had been woven into the fabric. Only time would tell what character the new pattern would show.

Diversity in Uniformity

Somehow, though not without heart-searching, trial and error, and compromise, hesitations were overcome, difficulties surmounted, differences tolerated. The richness of diversity triumphed over the limited pattern of uniformity. India and Pakistan first broke through the barriers of uncertainty and accepted membership. India subsequently became the first republic within the Commonwealth.

Could there be a constructive role for a heterogeneous group of nations, of many races, of differing environments and stages of development and lacking those ties of blood and common outlook which had bound the original members? Every Commonwealth nation today is living the answer to these questions.

A Third Stage

I believe that we have entered a third stage of development, its arrival accelerated by the twin pressures of nationalism and decolonization. Suddenly, in less than half a decade, the concept of the small circle, of restricted membership, has been transformed. In its place, we have accepted a new concept. All territories emerging to independent status along the constitutional path mapped out in co-operation with Britain can expect to be welcomed into full membership, provided they desire to be members and that they have, in the view of existing members, a sufficient capacity in the political and economic fields.

Furthermore - and this is now fundamental since March 1961 - they must accept the principle of non-discrimination in matters of race, creed and colour. There is no room for double standards if the Commonwealth is to be true to its purpose and destiny.

Membership Roll

Most, but not all, of the nations reaching independence in co-operation with Britain have chosen to remain in the Commonwealth. Ireland and Burma, in widely differing circumstances, have chosen to go their separate ways. British Somaliland and the British trust territory of the Cameroons