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THE COMMONWEALTH - DIVERSITY IN UNITY

"Without a common juridical base present in all countries of the Commonwealth," Prime Minister Diefenbaker assured the Second Commonwealth and Empire Law Conference in Ottawa on September 19, "it would not have been possible to have the very programme that you have been following these several days. From family law to restrictive trade practices, from administrative tribunals to criminal justice, the themes, the language, the concepts are at home everywhere in all Commonwealth halls of law and justice." Mr. Diefenbaker observed that Marxists spoke of "broad impersonal forces that move inexorably to some grim, fore-ordained end." "This is not so of the Commonwealth," he declared. "It involves the sentiments, emotions and interests of vast hosts dispersed around the globe, varying profoundly in background, temperament, language, religion and culture....What perpetuates the Commonwealth is a collective will to perpetuate it."

The complex harmony of the Commonwealth formed the subject of the body of Mr. Diefenbaker's address, which follows:

"...The Commonwealth is not jeopardized when a unanimity of views is hard to obtain. It is a sign of vitality when the Commonwealth partnership means different things to different people; and it is when a number of these different things converge that unity is achieved. A rigid uniformity would make the Commonwealth brittle. A loose convergence gives the Commonwealth its flexibility. And that is what has enabled it to weather every storm.

"Two underlying Commonwealth motivations seem to puzzle outsiders. There are those who take pride in a common heritage of law, of modes of government, of public life. Then there are those who would maintain the Commonwealth connection merely because it is convenient for them to do so. Some, feeling the pull of history, are creatures of the past; others, pragmatic rather than historic in their outlook, are impelled in part by practical considerations.

BONDS OF THE SPIRIT

"The Commonwealth is no mere contrivance to be used or discarded as befits the needs of the moment. Like the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth does not have a written Constitution; but, unlike the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth has no Constitution at all. Every other international undertaking begins with a signed contract -- treaties, covenants, charters. I once used these words to describe it -- 'The bonds are not of the sword or of the seal but of the spirit'. Their place is taken in the Commonwealth by historic forces that still do much to inspire, guide and re-shape it.

"Not all members of the Commonwealth have the same attitude towards the Crown. For Canadians it is the indispensable focus of Commonwealth unity.

"Traditional values are, then, still at the heart of our affairs. Each generation must, all the same, have first principles restated in contemporary terms. Commonwealth ideals

(Over)