

It will be financed through the CFTC – contributions, it is hoped, being expanded appropriately.

How to sum up this quarter-century? Most people who know the facts – and they are little publicized – would, I think, agree that, in what is called “functional co-operation”, relatively specialized and low-key but down-to-earth fields such as law, education, science, health, technical assistance and techniques of government, the Commonwealth is a logical grouping that can be used, and increasingly is being used, effectively for constructive purposes.

Rhodesian issue

When one comes to high politics, or “gut” politics – perhaps the same thing – the verdict might be mixed. I remember being asked at a press conference in Africa a year or two ago, by a rather bellicose radio correspondent, whether I really thought the Commonwealth’s record on the Rhodesian issue was satisfactory. I think he expected to put me on the spot. I said I considered it decidedly unsatisfactory, very far from what would be desirable. “So,” I added, “is that of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity.” But when international organizations are too weak to deal effectively with the challenges they face, the sensible course, I suggested, would be to strengthen them, rather than to weaken them by cynicism and unimaginative hostility. My interrogator did not disagree.

I myself thought that paratroops should be stationed in Zambia in 1965 before the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), and that they could have ended any rebellion in half an hour, with only a show of force, by giving the Rhodesian troops something to rally to. I still think so. But this could not be brought about. Economic sanctions were introduced instead – and unfortunately introduced only gradually, with almost an inoculation effect.

The sanctions policy, for all its inadequacy, was better than nothing – it used the occasion of UDI at least to get not only the whole of the Commonwealth but soon also the UN committed to the real issue, which was not an unconstitutional 1965 rebellion but much more long-standing racial injustice. The second-best policy, adopted *faute de mieux*, at least prevented recognitions and sell-outs.

Another shrill and agonizing crisis over race relations in Southern Africa arose when Mr. Heath’s Government, in the summer of 1970, announced a plan to sell arms to South Africa to counter a Soviet naval build-up. I could understand

Mr. Heath’s concern about the naval build-up on oil-routes. I could not understand how a stepped-up Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic could be sensibly offset by a change of British policy that would alienate virtually every government and people on the coasts of those two oceans.

The upshot of the use of Commonwealth machinery and consultations was that the British Government quietly dropped the idea. There was no public gloating, no face unnecessarily lost. Britain was saved from an error that would in my judgment have been even more costly to British interests than the ill-judged Suez aggression in 1956, and much more costly to the West as a whole. Africa, too, was saved from a costly set-back.

Bringing about basic readjustments in policies towards each other of nations, continents and racial groups is not easy, or free from emotional wear and tear. But recollection at least should be cool. On that occasion, the effectiveness of the use of the Commonwealth was, I think, considerable and very positive. Since then, Commonwealth influence in Southern African issues, including Mozambique and Namibia, has been fairly consistently constructive, and on occasion very important. The principles approved by the heads of government at their Kingston meeting this year are a good illustration of progress, and the expectation of much more progress to come.

Other crises

There have been many other crises, or less-publicized but nevertheless very dangerous political issues, with which Commonwealth consultation or machinery has had to deal in the past quarter-century – and not least in the past decade. Sometimes Commonwealth action has been successful, sometimes not. It has, I think, never been unhelpful. There is no space to examine most of these issues here, and some crises forestalled are still perhaps best left in silence.

I must, however, refer to one set of issues, arising from Britain’s relation with the EEC. Personally, I had urged my British friends from 1950 on, when I was living in Brussels, to join the European institutions. In the early 1960s, other Commonwealth governments rather emotionally opposed Britain’s belated decision to apply. I disagreed. When I became Secretary-General in 1965, I did all I could to discourage the idea that there need be any incompatibility between Britain’s membership in Europe and its membership in the Commonwealth – a

Troops in Zambia could have ended Rhodesian rebellion