

Canada and Commonwealth consultation:

*or a funny thing happened on the way
to the Heads of Government Meeting*

There are two major meetings where members assemble informally, one for the heads of government and the other for senior officials. There is much ground to cover; political, social, economic issues are all raised. Happily, members speak to one another, not to the forum. A frank discussion, delegate to delegate, means a lot more than a full-blown speech whose dramatics outweigh its content.

The Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, recognized the value of this kind of meeting:

This is one forum where we can speak frankly and generate less rancour. We have the same backgrounds, use the same terms of reference. We inherited basic institutions and concepts of government in society. We understand each other better than any other group does. We use the same diction and concepts. It does not mean that we all stay put. We are all evolving and discovering our own personalities. We have all been brought up in similar institutions, with ideas and ideals which make it possible for us to speak with an informality and intimacy which is not possible elsewhere.

In a world where so many talk so much to achieve so little, this is heartwarming. Canada also likes the collegial and consensus approach to decisions of Commonwealth meetings on potentially divisive issues. When Prime Minister Trudeau greeted the delegates to the 1974 Commonwealth finance ministers' meeting in Ottawa, he reflected this attitude in his remarks:

In our view, there is simply no other association that permits men and women from virtually all parts of the world to gather so informally and so successfully to seek solutions to problems of common concern. In the Commonwealth, we employ our energies in attacking problems, not in attacking one another.

The same spirit and approach is evident at Commonwealth meetings of a more specialized nature. Economic matters have been discussed at the