

Canada and the Commonwealth Association:

*or everything you wanted to know about
the Commonwealth (but didn't think of asking)*

Canada played a more fundamental role in the emergence of the Commonwealth than did even the mother country, Britain. It was the Canadian insistence on achieving independent status within the British Empire that provided the first focus round which the future Commonwealth association could crystallize. Canada was searching for a form of association that would allow it the full independence befitting a mature and sovereign state, while retaining the traditional connection with Britain and its Empire.

The Commonwealth proved to be the answer to this problem. The British Empire evolved into the British Commonwealth and, finally, into the Commonwealth of Nations (or just "the Commonwealth"). Throughout these changes, member countries, whether a monarchy such as New Zealand or a republic like India, agreed that the Queen should be the symbol and head of the Commonwealth. This was reaffirmed by the decision of Heads of Government that their 1977 meeting, which in the normal course of events would have rotated to some other capital, should be held in London when the Queen celebrated the Jubilee of her accession as head of the Commonwealth.

The development of the Commonwealth has been in a direction that is complementary to Canadian interests and attitudes — it is a family association in which we can feel at home. The Commonwealth's frankness, its informality, its freedom from super-power hegemony, its concern with practical co-operation, its diversity and its directness, are all aspects that reflect Canadian desires and approaches. As Prime Minister Trudeau expressed it in his opening address to the 1973 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting:

Within the Commonwealth we have the opportunity and the means for both communication and understanding. In this forum of discussion, all Commonwealth members are equal. None is senior; none is superior. None is distinguished by economic self-sufficiency; none is possessed of all political virtue. In our discussions during the next