

I shall not go on to list all the problems that were considered at the conference; they are the problems of the world, and I fear they remain unsolved even after being given a week of such high-level examination in Ottawa. As I said earlier, quoting our Prime Minister, it is not really the function of these conferences to solve problems so much as to make the participants aware, not only of the problems but of the views and perspectives — and, indeed, of the degrees of importance given them — presented by their colleagues from every corner of the globe. Ideally, no doubt, this development of mutual comprehension would be one of the results of the annual sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, but I do not think that this has been the experience of many attending these sessions in New York. How could it be, in an organization of 123 members of differing languages, traditions and conceptions of the world?

For Canada, the Commonwealth is important for a number of reasons. It is, of course, a part of our history — and if our British friends claim the credit for its invention I think we can claim with equal truth that the Commonwealth evolved from the unique process of amicable decolonization that brought Canada to peaceful independence. It is also, in a very real sense, one of our primary windows on the world. It is an illogical organization, with no constitution, no primary function, and no defined world role. Perhaps for that very reason it can bring together statesmen from every part of the world — not to agree, not to solve world problems, not to create a new world order, but simply to exchange views and understand each other better.

For Canada, and perhaps also for most of the other countries making up the Commonwealth that neither are nor aspire to be great powers, this is perhaps sufficient reason to value the nebulous Commonwealth association. We all have other associations, deriving from our respective geographical, economic and security imperatives — and membership in the Commonwealth does not preclude them. But, for Canada — in a way that would not be relevant for a great power as super-power, where global interests and perspective are almost taken for granted —, it is important that our image of ourselves should not be too much circumscribed by our geography or even by our immediate economic and political concerns. This has led us not only to value our Commonwealth association but to be active in developing our contacts with Europe, with the Organization of American States, and with our neighbours on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Each of these associations has its own practical value; together, they help develop international awareness and even an international personality for Canada.

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