



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE MEANING OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Notes prepared for an Address by Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, to the Royal Commonwealth Society, Toronto, March 30, 1962.

I intend to speak tonight about the Commonwealth - but leave it to the constitutional scientists to define the Commonwealth. To me it is incapable of simple definition. I am more concerned with how the Commonwealth came to be what it is and what are the attributes which have given it in the past - and give it today - a continuing significance in world affairs.

To appreciate the complex balance of the present-day Commonwealth, it is necessary to begin by recalling the stages through which it has passed.

Opinions vary on its date of origin. Its roots stretch back into history. What can be said, however, is that its first stage of growth came to an end shortly after the Second World War.

What were the characteristics of that first stage? First, the original members were of British or, in some cases, of other European stock. They became the natural heirs of the British political legacy. Second, their loyalty and allegiance to the Crown were unquestioned and freely given. Third, free co-operation was their instrument. Free institutions were the life-blood of their partnership. When tyranny threatened, they were to be found in the vanguard of the ranks of freedom.

The founder nations did not join the Commonwealth. They were its inventors. They depended on it, not only as the sentimental expression of a family association, but also as the principal foundation of their roles on the international stage.

An Era of Change

The Second World War and its aftermath brought revolutionary changes. New nations were rising to reach for the goal of independence in freedom. For the first time, peoples of races other than white, of creeds other than Christian, of stock other than European, were asserting their claims to enter into full and equal partnership.