

## STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS - A CANADIAN VIEW

Address by the Canadian Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Arnold Heeney, to The Round Table, Palm Beach, Florida, on February 21, 1955.

Three weeks ago today in London, eight men met about a table at No. 10 Downing Street. Seven of them were Prime Ministers; the eighth a Deputy Prime Minister. The nations whose governments they headed covered great territories in every main quarter of the globe. Their peoples were of many races and tongues and many creeds. Together they represented one-fourth of the world's population. They were themselves almost as different in aspect and personality as the inhabitants of their several countries. Yet they were meeting together in complete equality as the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth.

At the head of the table was the English host, the incomparable Winston Churchill, for long the epitome of everything that is Britain. With him sat Louis Stephen St. Laurent, bearing the name of that great river up which his French ancestors had sailed to establish Canada; and Robert Menzies and Sidney Holland, heads of the two stoutly British nations of Australasia; and Pandit Nehru and Mohammed Ali and John Kotelawala, whose three young governments divide the whole vast area of the ancient Indian sub-continent; finally, Godfrey Huggins of the new African federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and C.R. Swart, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa.

For nine days, with numbers of their colleagues and advisers, these eight men conferred in the privacy of that old room. They met as friends without formality and talked with easy freedom and frankness of the great problems of mankind - of peace and war, of the removal of differences between nations and widening the area of understanding, of world trade and finance, of economic progress and mutual assistance, of the challenge of atomic energy - of the relations of their countries to one another and to other nations and peoples. Without fixed agenda or formal procedure they exchanged information and views and compared ideas about how best to ease the anxious strains which had developed in the Western and Eastern worlds. They explored means of co-operation among themselves and their governments in the efforts which each was making to raise the standards of their own peoples. They sought new ways to enhance the value of their own association "in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress".

Because these men met at a particularly anxious time in the Far East, one may be sure that much serious attention was given to the complex and stubborn problems of that area. One may be certain, too, that the Asians among them put forward their own views of the courses best calculated to relieve the tensions which had been mounting rapidly in the preceding weeks between the United States and Communist China. One may be equally confident that those about the table who were close allies of the United States - the only North American present, your ANZUS partners and that tireless champion of Anglo-American friendship, the Chairman himself - would not have failed to explain the viewpoint of the United States. We know, too, that the implications for all nations of the military and peaceful employment of nuclear energy were discussed. Indeed, in such a company, it may be assumed that none of the great problems confronting governments throughout the world were wholly ignored or avoided.

The public were given little solid report of what transpired at these nine days meetings of Prime Ministers. One declaration was made on behalf of the Conference before its end. But it had to do with a matter which was in a sense domestic to the loose society which the participants comprised. It reported the intention of Pakistan to alter her form of government from monarchy to republic and her desire, none the less, to continue her full membership in the Commonwealth of Nations. It recorded the acceptance of this new situation by the other governments. When the meetings were over a final communique was also made public. This was a wide-ranging statement, with here and there a dash of Churchill himself. It touched upon many if not all of the gravest topics of international concern. But it was couched for the most part in the most general terms and contained little that was specific. It made it clear that the Commonwealth governments were in favour of peace and against war, in favour of liberty and against slavery, in favour of plenty and against scarcity. In fact they were in favour of righteousness and against sin! But in this final statement one will seek in vain agreed solutions for particular problems or the delineation of common policies. It may safely be added that the secret records of these meetings would make it evident that no such decisions had been sought.

Beyond these two somewhat unexciting statements, the public were given little indication of what went on over those nine days in London other than the usual group photographs, centering round a young and beautiful Queen. There were, of course, many columns of speculative comment from a great number of well-informed - and not so well-informed - journalists.

To the world outside it may have seemed strange that eight such busy heads of governments, harassed by the pressures of their own problems, should take such time and make such effort to come together, to produce such apparently insubstantial results. Yet the final communique, whatever its vagueness, makes it clear that all the Prime Ministers regarded their meetings as well

worth while. The Prime Minister of my own country, in a speech at the historic Guildhall the day he received the freedom of the City of London, put it this way:

"This association of nations has in the past rendered great service to a community that is broader than its own boundaries. I believe that it will continue to do so, and this latest series of Commonwealth meetings strengthens me in that belief."

It is difficult for those who are not themselves involved to understand our Commonwealth. And it is not too easy to explain. Even Americans, who for the most part know a good deal more about us than other people, are often confused and sometimes mistaken about the character and working of a political phenomenon which is unique in history. Only recently, for example, I came upon an article in an American magazine which suggested that the pattern employed by the Commonwealth would best solve the problem of Alaskan and Hawaiian statehood. Why, the author enquired, should you seek to add two distant stars to your flag of union when the precedent of the Commonwealth was available - and had already succeeded in Puerto Rico! "Puerto Ricans did not choose statehood," he went on, "they chose to be a dominion - like Canada."

And so I thought that, even if such grosser errors are not shared - as they surely cannot be by such an audience as this - it might be of some interest if I were to take this opportunity to express a Canadian view of an institution by which we in my country set much store. For we believe that the Commonwealth serves more than selfish purposes - that it is and can be in the future a valuable influence for peace and progress throughout the world.

Like all human institutions, the Commonwealth today is the product of its history - a history which extends over two and a half centuries. Its origins are to be found in the process known to historians as "the expansion of Europe" - a process, incidentally, during which the foundations of this nation were also laid.

Nowadays there is a tendency to emphasize the darker side of imperialism and colonialism. It was these expansive forces, nevertheless, which gave the impetus from which the new nations of the Commonwealth were to develop. None of us who live on this continent can look upon the colonial period as by any means wholly negative and bad. We, Americans and Canadians both, inherit valued traditions from the European powers who established their settlements in America in the 16th and 17th and 18th centuries. For you, the journeyings of the little wooden ships - British, French, and Spanish - began the process which led to the founding of a new nation consciously and deliberately separated from entanglements with the Old World. For us in Canada - and in those territories in Africa and Asia into which those early voyagers penetrated and in which they traded and often settled - a similar process led to the development of communities which retained associations with each other and with the European nations

from which they sprang. The history of the nations which compose the modern Commonwealth is a fascinating history, of great variety. Over the years it records a course from colony to nation, from the gradual achievement of local autonomy to the final establishment of independent sovereignty in the loose association which is the modern Commonwealth.

While bearing a direct relationship to the events which preceded 1776 in this country, the processes by which the peoples of the Commonwealth countries achieved their present situation differed markedly from that which led to the Declaration of Independence and the establishment of this Union. For one thing, the statesmanship which over the years contrived our modern arrangements was largely a co-operative effort between colonial and imperial politicians. Whether or not governments in London drew the right lessons from the American Revolution, there can be no doubt that many English statesmen played a constructive role in the evolution of a new conception of Empire. This is not to say that in all of the nations of the Commonwealth there were no difficulties with imperial Britain. Even in Canada, we had our sharp differences and difficulties with the British. And in other parts of the old Empire, notably in the Indian sub-continent, there was a long struggle - and sometimes violent episodes - before national independence was established.

Each of the present national units in our association contributed to the evolution of the finished Commonwealth pattern. Canada was the first of the former colonies to achieve full independence. The First World War hurried on the final stages of the process when our right to full control over our foreign relations was established. At the Imperial Conference of 1926 it was recorded as a matter of fact that all members of the Commonwealth - which then meant Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa - were "equal in status" and "freely associated". And this declaration was pinned down into legal form in what was called the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

The Asian countries of the modern Commonwealth, however, followed a different course. Unlike the Commonwealth countries in North America, Africa and Australasia, the Indian sub-continent was never colonized. Its great populations retained their ancient cultures and racial character. Alone of the seven present sovereign countries of the Commonwealth, these peoples in the old Empire engaged in a long and often bitter struggle for independence, before three new nations were carved out of the old Imperial India. That the wounds of such a struggle could be healed so quickly and that India, Pakistan, and Ceylon could voluntarily choose to remain within the Commonwealth is, surely, however, a tribute to the statesmanship of London as well as to that of New Delhi, Karachi, and Colombo.

The present Commonwealth was then achieved, not without differences and even armed revolt in some quarters. But it was essentially a process of evolution and adaptation to changing circumstances and needs. It was not on

the one hand a steady march toward a known goal, nor, on the other opposition to all change. From time to time theorists suggested federal solutions, grandiose schemes for a centralized Parliament in London in which all the member countries would be represented. Others proposed - and, indeed, for a while it was tried - an Imperial Cabinet. But these schemes foundered and dwindled away, and by the most pragmatic of processes the Commonwealth association developed into what we have today. In this process, the necessities of war played an important part. In such times of common emergency, there is no time for fussing about problems of status. All efforts need to be bent to the task of survival. Co-operation and the joint endeavour flourished in the Second World War in particular - a war which unhappily reduced the relative power of the British Isles as it enhanced in varying degree the authority and prestige of the other Commonwealth nations. Furthermore, the relations between the "outlying" members became more important until there developed the present criss-cross of relationships between the seven nations and their peoples across the world.

So much for our origins. And it is necessary to know something of our history to understand our present. But what have we in fact achieved in our modern Commonwealth of Nations? What is the character of our present association? What reason have we to claim - as we do - that the Commonwealth has a value for the world beyond the boundaries of its member nations?

In the first place, it should be understood, not only that the Commonwealth has no central machinery of government, but also that it has no constitution. The Commonwealth consists of seven self-governing nations and a number of units which are in various stages of progress toward autonomy. One of the nations of the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom, includes a non-self-governing Empire. These are the colonies, reaching out with the encouragement and guidance of London toward their own eventual independence. The United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ceylon have the same Sovereign. To Canadians, Elizabeth II is first the Queen of Canada, as to the British she is first the Queen of Great Britain - to the Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and Ceylonese likewise. Valued as is the Crown to my country and to others in the Commonwealth, however, we have found that there is now no problem in including republics within our association. The Republic of India is a full member. A Republic of Pakistan is soon to follow.

Not only is there no Commonwealth constitution, but there is equally no treaty of alliance, nor, indeed, any legal instrument of any kind which binds our seven nations together. Even those countries who owe allegiance to the Queen are governed entirely separately, and, other than by negotiation and consent, there is no means by which common policies can be formulated. It is quite misleading, therefore, to think or speak of a Commonwealth policy in foreign affairs, or, indeed, in any other field. It is even more misleading on specific issues to expect a Commonwealth "point of view". The government of each nation will decide its policies on the basis of considerations which apply to it. And, since the several nations have very

different problems to face and very different conditions to meet, we should not expect their governments always to come up with the same answers. It is not surprising, for example, that the point of view of India with regard to Far Eastern questions is different from that of Great Britain or of Canada. So one not infrequently finds that the representatives of Commonwealth governments at international meetings - at the United Nations for example - are arguing and voting on opposite sides. And the Queen of Canada, on the advice of her Canadian Ministers, may well reach decisions quite other than those to which the Queen of Britain is advised by her Ministers in the United Kingdom.

No, there is nothing monolithic about the Commonwealth of Nations. It is not even an alliance, much less a unit which speaks with one voice. If there is a term not wholly inconsistent with the modern facts, the Commonwealth of today can best be described as a new and peculiarly intimate form of entente.

I have been at some pains to tell you what the Commonwealth is not. But I must not conclude without putting to you, as I think most Canadians see it, the positive characteristics of this association which we cherish and which seems to us to work very well in practice.

Despite the great variety of race and language and religion which characterizes our nations, despite the wide disparity in the material and spiritual circumstances of our peoples, we do share, all of us, great common principles of government. These are usually described as democratic principles. But they are more than that. We have in common as well an attachment to the parliamentary system and the traditions of justice which we have inherited from the British Isles. Over the years, these institutions and practices have done much to create in our peoples a common attitude of mind toward the conduct of public affairs. It is true that local conditions have made necessary quite widely varying constitutional patterns. But the principles are the same and the practices very close in all our countries. This is an important element in our sense of community.

Broadly speaking, too, the aims of our peoples are the same. They were referred to in the final communique of the latest Prime Ministers' meetings as "peace, liberty, and progress". These fundamentals are shared by all our nations. We may not always agree on the policies best calculated to achieve these ends, but we will give each other credit for seeking them and, by and large, we will feel impelled to respect the right to differ on the means.

We should not omit as a unifying force the institution of the Crown. For Canadians and many others in the Commonwealth, allegiance to the same sovereign Queen contributes greatly to the strength of our partnership. Even those among us who may adopt a republican form of constitution accept the Crown as a "symbol" of our association and as the "head" of the Commonwealth. When to these somewhat abstruse constitutional concepts is added the charm and grace and devotion of a beautiful young Queen, the monarchy provides an important human as well as institutional link between us all.

Some observers, in desperation no doubt for a more accurate definition, have described the Commonwealth as a club. And there may be something in this though there is certainly no taint of exclusion or exclusiveness about us. At any rate since I have been in Washington particularly I have been impressed by the natural easy relationship which we seven Commonwealth Ambassadors have with one another. It is a relationship of complete equality and special intimacy which enables us, I think, to discuss with special frankness and candour our differences as well as our agreements. When one realizes that in all the great capitals of the world such special club facilities exist, one may imagine how useful such a network of association may be, not only for our own interests, but for the interests which we share with the rest of the free world.

Because of these things, the governments of the Commonwealth have developed habits and means of contact and consultation, particularly in foreign affairs. These have certainly been most useful to us, the younger nations of the Commonwealth, as our own diplomatic services have expanded, as our contacts with the outside world have become more complicated and as the issues of war and peace have come closer to our comprehension and more immediate to our interest. Such contacts and such consultation go on in and between the various capitals, by correspondence and by word of mouth. The periodic meetings of Prime Ministers, such as that which has but recently taken place, are merely one high means of exchanging views upon issues which concern us all. There are many others on less exalted planes. Although such consultations rarely result in anything approaching common policies, there can be no doubt that the effect of this friendly confrontation of differing interests and viewpoints helps us all to avoid extremes and to make fuller allowance for the attitudes to our friends.

The sun never set upon the old British Empire. It shines equally upon the nations of the modern Commonwealth. Our partnership is one which, unlike any other, spans the dangerous territory between West and East. So it is that one of the most valuable assets which we have is our link with Asia. The Republic of India, which alone can compete with Communist China for the leadership of the millions of Asia, remains our valued friend and partner within this loose society. So do those other young nations of the great sub-continent, Pakistan and Ceylon. Some of us may differ from the Government of India or the Government of South Africa, let us say - one would hardly expect our attitudes to be the same on all subjects - but we respect their right to their own viewpoint and to determine their own policies. And we discuss our differences pretty frankly and, I think, have some useful influence on one another. Surely the special entrée to Asia for example on the plane of equality and respect and friendship is a strength not only to the nations of the Commonwealth, but to the whole alliance of the free.

This Commonwealth of Nations is a political phenomenon which fits into no category and defies precise definition. It is governed, not from one capital, but

from seven. It straddles the continents of Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. It cuts across racial divisions and cultures. It is a co-operative partnership of nations and peoples at a time when elemental forces seem bent upon tearing our planet apart. In a world sorely divided and embittered by suspicion and fear and the struggle of contending political creeds, the Commonwealth stands as a voluntary association of sovereign states, committed in their dealings with one another to the principles of peace and justice - in its very variety and tolerance an example to the world of how nations can survive and prosper in mutual friendship and respect.

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