



Statements and Speeches

No. 74/17

THE COMMONWEALTH AND CANADA - ASSOCIATION FOR THE FUTURE

A Statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Allan J. MacEachen, to the Royal Commonwealth Society Toronto, November 27, 1974.

* * * *

...Essential to a continued understanding of, and involvement in, the Commonwealth, is an awareness by our young people of its true nature and value. The work accomplished by the (Royal Commonwealth) Society in this and other areas deserves the recognition commensurate with its importance.

Happily, I need not convince this audience that the Commonwealth is alive and well and living in a flourishing condition throughout the globe. But the cynics who have diagnosed the condition of the Commonwealth as moribund are legion. The late Dean Acheson, in one unfortunate extraterritorial foray in 1961, observed, not completely facetiously, that the Commonwealth did not exist, as it had no political structure, or unity, or strength.

In the Canadian judgment the evidence does not support this view. The association has both form and substance; the membership insists the Commonwealth continue and expand. The activities of the association, and of Commonwealth non-governmental organizations, grow; the Royal Commonwealth Society testifies to this. The Commonwealth persists, and like philosophy, consistently inters its undertakers.

Support for the Commonwealth remains a central element in Canadian foreign policy. Canada's commitment to the Commonwealth, which has evolved with time, is not the mere consequence of history; it is rather the consequence of the adaptive and responsive qualities of the association and its ability to accommodate and further policies and ideals consistent with Canadian national objectives.

The Commonwealth is a unique institution. Its members share a common language and a common historical experience. The Commonwealth includes no super-powers. It is not an arena of Cold War politics. It is not intended to pursue one specific goal, or to resolve one specific problem. It cannot be viewed purely in terms of developmental assistance, or of a donor-user equation. It draws its strength from the ideas and ideals inherent in British political

traditions and from their humanist values, of which the Commonwealth countries are legatees. Permeating the Commonwealth are the attitudes of a community created by a common historical experience, from which so many of the habits, institutions and values of Commonwealth countries continue to be built.

The common values held by members transcend racial, religious, cultural and geographic perimeters. They ease relationship and understanding. They bind members spanning all continents and stages of development, and embracing all races, in a mutual acknowledgement of equality. They condition Commonwealth activity. They permit free and frank discussion in Commonwealth assemblies unequalled elsewhere. These common values find expression in the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles adopted by heads of government at their meeting in Singapore in 1971: human dignity and equality, individual participation in framing the national society, a more equitable international society, the freest possible flow of international trade on fair and equitable terms, and a multinational approach to peace and progress.

These values, held in common by members, endow the Commonwealth with the flexibility needed to respond to challenges as they occur. This adaptability was shown in the Commonwealth's adjustment to a sixfold increase in membership in the postwar period, and in establishing the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965 to implement decisions, and to facilitate communication and co-operation. It is evident in the orientation of Commonwealth activity towards the concerns of newly-independent members, and the increasing stress on functional co-operation responsive to the needs of all members. From it has sprung a distinct Commonwealth mentality, predicated on a willingness to collaborate on a basis of equality. The anglocentric order has disappeared, and with it the hierarchical structure which had characterized the association. This has been replaced by a lateral pattern of relations. It is working well, and to the benefit of all members, including Britain.

Above all the Commonwealth is concerned with people. As the Prime Minister put it at last year's heads of government meeting: "We are concerned with the dignity of individual human beings and the improvement of the lot of ordinary men and women." In other words, answers to the world's problems which do not confer benefits upon ordinary human beings are not answers at all. And, in this, not only governments are involved but some 250 non-governmental Commonwealth organizations and societies. Here, I suggest, lies the Commonwealth's true strength. Foreign policy is, after all, only a framework; the people must make it live.

It is not designed just to guide intergovernmental relations, but depends on public interest, which it reflects, and on public support.

Though largely unperceived outside it, the focus of Commonwealth activity has shifted away from purely political concerns during the last decade. This culminated in the 1973 heads of government meeting in Ottawa, and the specific decision by heads of government "to make maximum use of Commonwealth machinery to put the principles of the Commonwealth Declaration into practice, and to accelerate the pace of social and economic development among the less affluent members". It is this dynamic element and this commitment that provide the key to the understanding and value of the Commonwealth today. Officially this finds expression through the programs administered by the Commonwealth Secretariat. These programs, begun since 1969, include: the Commonwealth Foundation, established to increase exchanges between Commonwealth professional organizations; the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, with its triple focus of technical assistance, education and training, and export development; the Commonwealth Youth Program, established in 1973 to involve young people in national development; and the Program for Applied Studies in Government, to provide training for middle- and senior-level government officials. Complementing this is the increased activity of non-governmental organizations in such diverse fields as medicine and law, science and education.

During this period leading to a concentration on functional co-operation, political questions were not ignored; the Commonwealth's discussion of *apartheid*, Rhodesia and nuclear testing confirms this. Nor are political questions ignored now, as demonstrated by the decision by heads of government in 1973 to provide humanitarian assistance to the indigenous people of the territories of southern Africa in their efforts to achieve self-determination, a decision prompting considerable change in Canada's own policy on this question. But politics *per se* do count for less, and when political questions arise, they are approached in a manner that enables members to accept different positions, to identify the common elements in them, to determine whether they are amenable to Commonwealth treatment, and then to move forward from this agreed basis to a solution or an amelioration of the problem. The stress increasingly is on practical collaboration and co-operation, and the avoidance of futile political altercations.

The role of Canada, of successive ministers and prime ministers, and of Prime Minister Trudeau in particular, was critical in engineering this change. It was largely through the interventions

and suggestions of the Prime Minister at successive heads of government meetings in London and Singapore in 1969 and 1971 and in Ottawa last year that this new focus for Commonwealth activity emerged so sharply. Illustrative of this was the proposal by Prime Minister Trudeau at Singapore that an item on comparative techniques of government be included in the agenda of future meetings.

It is a complex subject, including such problems as that of forward financial planning, and such philosophical ones as the relative functions of politicians and public servants. But the key problem of reaching the people, hearing from them and responding to their wishes is essentially the same for all governments at all levels. This subject was discussed by heads of government at their meeting in Ottawa last year; it will again be on the agenda when they meet in Jamaica in April 1975.

With the decision by heads of government at their meeting in Ottawa last year to reinforce and expand Commonwealth functional co-operation, trends and ideas evident in meetings going back a decade crystallized, and a new stage in the evolution of the association was reached.

Since this meeting, the scale and tempo of Commonwealth functional co-operation have increased remarkably. So has Canadian participation. The budget for the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, stimulated in large part by the matching formula marking the Canadian contribution, has doubled, attaining a level of \$7.5 million. Our own contribution this year will probably reach the \$3-million mark. The Commonwealth Youth Program, approved by heads of government in 1973, has set up a youth-awards scheme and has established two regional centres for advanced studies in youth work and will soon inaugurate one more. The Commonwealth Foundation established, or helped establish, professional centres in Commonwealth capitals, financed a new journal on intermediate technology and, with the Canadian International Development Agency, strengthened an intra-Commonwealth bursary scheme to benefit agriculturalists and veterinary officers.

The Commonwealth Science Committee agreed to work more closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and to set definite objectives for intra-Commonwealth collaboration on establishing procedures and mechanics for national science policy, and for research management and administration. Education ministers met last June and recommended, among other things, that copyright-free educational material be made available to Commonwealth developing countries and reprinted and distributed locally.

This month, the Commonwealth Medical Conference in Colombo examined the question of health-service delivery in rural areas. Thirty-five specialized conferences and meetings have been held this year permitting detailed, in-depth examination, of specific questions, and exchanges of views and experience by participants based on long and varied experience.

Research papers for use by members have been prepared by the Secretariat. Among these were papers on relations between Commonwealth countries and the enlarged European Economic Community, the problem of equitable and remunerative terms of trade, the economic consequences of the increase of petroleum prices, multinational corporations, and possible Commonwealth action on fertilizer production.

The Secretariat provides support to Commonwealth governments in their negotiations with the European Community through studies on commodity exports, and on Community proposals to stabilize the export earnings of associates and potential associates, as well as those that have not been offered the option of association. The impact of such Secretariat assistance on the countries concerned is immediate and direct; its value and merit require no elaboration.

The Secretariat's Legal Division has arranged exchanges of information on new legislation, the work of law reform commissions, case law and the administration of justice in general. Cabinet secretaries meet to exchange views on forward planning and financial control in government, and to compare procedures and techniques, and to learn from one another in this most critical area of government operations. Following study of the question by an expert group, a report is being prepared on the feasibility of establishing a Commonwealth investment bank, intended to marshal concessionary and commercial resources into financial packages to promote projects in the directly productive sectors of Commonwealth developing countries. Heads of government will consider this report at their meeting in 1975 in Jamaica. Each of these activities has been oriented to the encouragement and intensification of co-operation.

These programs mounted by the Commonwealth enjoy economies not available to multilateral programs elsewhere. Overhead is low; costs of Secretariat programs are less than 15 per cent, liberating the bulk of the funds available for program activity. The return for money invested is good value, and the programs worth while. Response is rapid, and there is precision in meeting needs. In the case of smaller members, whose needs are not met by other

multilateral programs, Commonwealth assistance is often of critical value. The Commonwealth is thus an effective and efficient multilateral channel for aid.

Canada actively supports each of these programs to which I have referred. We also contribute to Commonwealth development in the Secretariat, where Canadians fill positions at various levels. A former Torontonion, Arnold Smith, has been Secretary-General for ten years, and has rendered outstanding service to the Commonwealth.

But Canadian support rests on a variety of other considerations as well. The lines of communication, established over the years, and the conventions that govern its activities are tried and tested instruments for diplomatic concourse. The association provides, through its evolution, a unique forum where members discuss and exchange views in complete candour and informality, on a basis of full equality. The practice of understanding differences and resolving problems, of seeking constructive solutions by agreement rather than by voting, brings members together, rather than dividing them; this cohesion reinforces Commonwealth endeavour and makes co-operation easier. The Commonwealth allows us considerable latitude for action in a body where no super-power is a member. We understand the way it works. It is worth our while.

The Commonwealth provides access to, and makes us beneficiary of, ideas and experience, and a formidable repository of collective knowledge. The association facilitates relations with member countries, and gives an added dimension to our bilateral relations. It acts as an antidote and counterweight to continental drift. The Commonwealth remains useful as a sounding-board for our ideas, for gauging the response of members, and for calculating the likely response in larger forums. It is, as well, a source of ideas in itself. It provides a particular perspective on international questions and, within the limits to which any international assembly is subject, a vehicle for their possible solution or amelioration.

The ideas and experiences exchanged and the program operations may not be critical to continued Canadian development. They are, however, useful and do influence, however moderately, the pattern of development in Canada.

Within the ambit of Canadian foreign policy, the Commonwealth provides one outlet for the national personality to be given some manifestation abroad. In this respect, the Commonwealth

provides a real theatre of action for an interested domestic constituency, such as the Royal Commonwealth Society, which wishes to participate in an identifiable and specific manner in international affairs. The Commonwealth is, in the words of Prime Minister Trudeau, "our window on the world". It provides one more forum for our active participation in world affairs. Membership in the Commonwealth also represents a reinforcement and further extension of the calculated policy of diversification of Canadian interests and engagements throughout the world to offset the pull of continentalism.

The Commonwealth is the oldest international association to which we belong. It may be viewed as parallel to our involvement in the Agency for Technical and Cultural Co-operation, the Agence, its *francophone* counterpart. Our policy towards it will necessarily be conditioned by its aims and purposes, its composition, and the policies of member governments towards it. The larger number of developing countries within the Commonwealth, and their requirements, understandably orient its activities in this direction. This is not, however, an exclusive orientation. All members participate with equal status, and contribute collectively to Commonwealth endeavours. All share the benefits. This sense of community is imperative to the continued welfare and existence of the association, and it is our intent to nourish and to cultivate this sense.

We shall continue to strengthen the association and preserve the candour and informality of its discussions, to encourage more active participation in it by members, and to support its development, and that of its non-governmental organizations, as instruments for greater practical co-operation. In particular we shall encourage greater involvement by members in Commonwealth endeavours to understand and correct the difficulties posed by the imperatives of continuing modernization. We view this as an essential element in maintaining the coherence of the association. In so doing we recognize the limits - both economic and political - to which the Commonwealth is subject, and the competing international priorities that vie vigorously for attention. These limits will not, however, restrict us in seeking the achievement of this triple objective.

The principles expressed in the Commonwealth Declaration are essential to the continued existence of the association in a form acceptable to Canada, and we shall persist in our support for them, and their application.

For Canada, Commonwealth activity has a direct, and distinct,

impact on three levels. Nationally, it satisfies the aims and aspirations of Canadians; it meets a very real need, whether conscious or unconscious, to find expression for a wider range of contacts; it provides satisfaction for an altruistic wish to do something about the problems of the world. Within the Commonwealth itself, it reinforces the association; it helps to strengthen Commonwealth identity and character; it assists continuity of Commonwealth activities. Internationally, it reinforces the "thrust" of foreign policy generally, and helps us to do a job that must be done with Commonwealth colleagues. At all these levels, the association will continue to figure prominently in our calculations.

It is against this background that we are now preparing for the heads of government meeting next April. The dynamic of international events will require us to add new questions to those with which heads of government are already familiar. The guideline must be to anticipate and analyze problems before they assume crisis proportions. We shall, with other governments, rededicate ourselves to the value and continuity of Commonwealth achievement.

8
4548

S/C