



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.

There were difficulties to challenge the breadth of vision, the human tolerance, the material generosity and the inventive genius of the original members. Some said that racial differences would prove insurmountable. It was doubted that an acceptable formula could be found by which the different Commonwealth nations could be related to the Crown.

Others feared that the new Asian and African nations, with their history of occupation rather than colonization, would be carried away by the winds of freedom, unwilling or unable to remain in close partnership with the original members, and especially Britain. The attitude of the new nations to both Crown and Commonwealth was bound to differ from that of the members whom they came to join. The Commonwealth would never be the same again, for new strands had been woven into the fabric. Only time would tell what character the new pattern would show.

Diversity in Uniformity

Somehow, though not without heart-searching, trial and error, and compromise, hesitations were overcome, difficulties surmounted, differences tolerated. The richness of diversity triumphed over the limited pattern of uniformity. India and Pakistan first broke through the barriers of uncertainty and accepted membership. India subsequently became the first republic within the Commonwealth.

Could there be a constructive role for a heterogeneous group of nations, of many races, of differing environments and stages of development and lacking those ties of blood and common outlook which had bound the original members? Every Commonwealth nation today is living the answer to these questions.

A Third Stage

I believe that we have entered a third stage of development, its arrival accelerated by the twin pressures of nationalism and decolonization. Suddenly, in less than half a decade, the concept of the small circle, of restricted membership, has been transformed. In its place, we have accepted a new concept. All territories emerging to independent status along the constitutional path mapped out in co-operation with Britain can expect to be welcomed into full membership, provided they desire to be members and that they have, in the view of existing members, a sufficient capacity in the political and economic fields.

Furthermore - and this is now fundamental since March 1961 - they must accept the principle of non-discrimination in matters of race, creed and colour. There is no room for double standards if the Commonwealth is to be true to its purpose and destiny.

Membership Roll

Most, but not all, of the nations reaching independence in co-operation with Britain have chosen to remain in the Commonwealth. Ireland and Burma, in widely differing circumstances, have chosen to go their separate ways. British Somaliland and the British trust territory of the Cameroons

decided to find their nationhood in company with neighbouring territories outside the Commonwealth. South Africa withdrew in 1961 in the face of a widespread and deeply felt aversion to its policy on the racial problem.

The roll of membership is lengthening. Five nations in 1947; today, after 15 years, the number is 13, with other nations approaching the time when decisions on membership will be made.

Such radical changes in the Commonwealth family have made the old intimacy and comradeship no longer automatic, and much harder to achieve. The free institutions of the old Commonwealth have not everywhere survived unimpaired. It has become more vital that there must be the fullest measure of consultation.

What have we got to put in the place of that which has been lost? How can we take the fullest advantage of the attributes which remain?

In international as in national affairs, the successful practice of politics must rest on realism. If the Commonwealth is to fulfil its potential for good, its limitations as well as the benefits it holds must be understood and respected.

Reasons for Joining

The reasons which have led new nations to seek membership in recent years, and which cause the older members to contribute to the continuing strength of the Commonwealth tie, are many. There are material benefits in the field of trade, economic and technical assistance, scientific co-operation, and other specialized fields. Trade has been an important and essential link in the bonds of the Commonwealth throughout its successive transformations. Commonwealth trade has brought benefits to all members. Commonwealth countries have had many different kinds of trade connections with one another.

In recent years, preferential treatment has been widespread among Commonwealth countries. While the Commonwealth must always show flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances, it is of importance that the mutual benefits of this established trading association among Commonwealth countries shall not be lost.

Aid, as well as trade, must have a significant place in the modern Commonwealth. In the field of economic and technical assistance the newer, less-developed members have the most to gain at the present relative stages of development among Commonwealth countries. Wherever poverty and famine reign, the future of freedom is in jeopardy. Living standards must be raised.

As part of its aid programme, Canada's contribution to development assistance in the newer countries of the Commonwealth makes up the bulk of its \$50 million a year contribution to the Colombo Plan. Further substantial contributions in capital aid are made under our programmes of assistance to African Commonwealth countries and to The West Indies.

Advantages of Aid Programme

We have much to gain from participation in this world-wide enterprise. Those who question the value of expenditure on external aid should not overlook the commercial dividends inherent in the creation of expanding markets. In material terms, aid today can mean increased trade tomorrow. Through generous co-operation we can help ourselves as well as others.

Educational exchanges illustrate the fact that the benefits of co-operation move in more than one direction. Under the Commonwealth Education Programme, which was initiated by the Canadian Government in 1958 at the Montreal Trade and Economic Conference, nearly 200 scholars from other lands in the Commonwealth are this year pursuing courses at Canadian universities. At the same time, 61 Canadian scholars have accepted awards to study in other Commonwealth countries under the plan.

There are in Canada at present a further 152 students and trainees from other Commonwealth countries under the education programme of the Colombo Plan and 69 under the Special Commonwealth African Aid Programme. Furthermore, 50 Canadian teachers, doctors, scientists, administrators, engineers and other experts are spread throughout the Commonwealth in the work of technical assistance, also under the Colombo Plan. An additional 40 Canadian advisers in various fields of activity are serving in Africa under the Special Commonwealth African Aid Programme, seven under a separate Canadian programme of assistance to that area, and six in other Commonwealth countries.

There is, as well, an even larger, but undetermined, number of students from all parts of the Commonwealth studying at Canadian universities under non-governmental auspices and a substantial number of Canadians in the same category studying in Commonwealth countries abroad.

The contribution to international and inter-racial understanding made by these exchanges cannot be measured in dollars or statistics. To continue in unity and strength, the Commonwealth must exemplify the best in those intangible human relationships that determine the motivations and the policies of nations.

The urge that impels every nation today to find its natural affiliations in the world is another cause for the attraction of new members to the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Flexibility

The Commonwealth is flexible. It does not prevent its members from forming other affiliations. Indeed, Commonwealth countries have developed their ties with non-Commonwealth nations. All members can and do enjoy the advantages of Commonwealth membership without foregoing affiliation with non-Commonwealth neighbours and allies.

Australia and New Zealand in ANZUS and SEATO, Canada and Britain in NATO, Canada with the United States in NORAD, Pakistan in the Central Treaty Organization, Malaya in its defence relation with Britain, Australia and New Zealand -- these are examples of commitments that extend beyond the Commonwealth yet do not impair the continued allegiance of individual Commonwealth members to our association.

It should be recognized that African members are concerned with African aspirations, and it is important that membership in the Commonwealth should not create conflicts of interest.

With respect to certain countries such as India, Ceylon and the African nations, another important factor has come into play. Their response to the threat of Communism contrasts with that of the older members, and indeed with that of Pakistan and Malaya. Non-alignment in the Cold War lies at the root of the foreign policies of a strong and significant grouping of Commonwealth member nations.

The Commonwealth association is large enough in spirit and purpose, and elastic enough, to provide a framework for the association of nations, regardless of how they react to the Communist threat. It is only realistic to accept the fact that these differences in outlook have placed, and continue to place, a limit on the area of common ground which exists between the foreign and defence policies of Commonwealth nations.

Nevertheless, one fundamental principle is held in common -- the determination to prevent war. It is significant that, at the last meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers, agreement was reached on a statement of principles on disarmament. This was a measure of the common ground on which all the Commonwealth countries stand. It was a measure too of their common yearning for peace among the nations of the world.

Racial Challenge

Will the Commonwealth continue? In examining the continuing attributes of the Commonwealth the racial problem is a basic one. The Asian and African members have repeatedly underlined their view that the Commonwealth association cannot stand for less than full equality. Canada's position in support of that principle is clear and unequivocal. It is now a firm principle of the Commonwealth. Without it, the association in its present form is an impossibility.

In the efforts now being made to build inter-racial societies in African territories -- the Rhodesias, Kenya and Tanganyika -- the full observance of genuine equality for both the white and the non-white populations provides hope for the present and the future.

Racial equality is basic to the Commonwealth and must be maintained. In addition, there are other aspects of human rights for which the Commonwealth has traditionally stood -- freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from acts of an arbitrary executive power.

The Commonwealth must stand for freedom. It is essential that these objectives should continue as standards of behaviour for all Commonwealth countries.

I come now to the question of Commonwealth consultation -- the constant flow of information and discussion at different levels between the several governments of the Commonwealth.

At the centre of this process of consultation are the meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers. They bring the leaders together. There is no other meeting or conference in the world that provides for such frank and wide-ranging discussion both inside and outside the conference room.

Consideration has recently been given to the future organization of these meetings. It has been estimated that, within the next ten years, the total number of full members may rise as high as 24 nations. How will it be possible in an enlarged Commonwealth to conduct deliberations as frankly and profitably as heretofore? Should the meetings of prime ministers be limited in size, and if so, by what formula? Should these meetings take place -- not in rotation, but from time to time -- elsewhere than in London?

It is important to find acceptable solutions to these problems because, in the absence of effective consultation and understanding among leaders, the essential spirit of the Commonwealth will not be sustained.

Within the past year a new and potentially serious problem has arisen among those who have the future of the Commonwealth at heart. Britain has entered negotiations to determine the conditions on which it could become a full member of the European Common Market. On every side people are asking: how would such a move on Britain's part affect the Commonwealth?

The European Economic Community results from the efforts to create a closer economic and political union in Europe, culminating in the Treaty of Rome of 1957. This treaty in itself represents a major achievement of its six member nations - France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

EEC Institutions

- (1) Council of Ministers - The Council is to be composed of six representatives, one from each member state. It is to be the policy-making body of the Community, with power to make decisions and issue rules and regulations, for the most part on the recommendations of the Commission. Except as otherwise provided, decisions are taken by a simple majority. In the first stage of the transitional period, however, which was concluded on December 31, 1961, most Council decisions required a unanimous vote.

- (2) Commission - The Commission is to be composed of nine members appointed for their general competence and independence for a period of four years, with no more than two members having the nationality of the same state.

The Commission will be responsible for elaborating detailed policies implementing the Rome Treaty (e.g. the common agricultural and commercial policies) and for making recommendations to the Council; it will supervise the execution of the latter's decisions and also has authority to make certain decisions, generally of an administrative nature, within the framework established by the Rome Treaty. The Secretariat of the Commission in Brussels will, to all practical purposes, become the civil service of the Community.

- (3) Assembly - The Assembly is to be composed of 142 delegates from the Parliaments of member countries, but it is proposed that they should eventually be elected by direct universal suffrage.

The functions of the Assembly will be chiefly advisory. It can, by vote of censure concerning the activities of the Commission, force the collective resignation of the nine Commissioners. The Assembly is common to the Common Market, the European Coal and Steel Community, and the European Atomic Energy Community.

- (4) Court of Justice - The Court of Justice is to be composed of seven judges appointed for a term of six years by the governments of the member states acting in common agreement.

The Court is to ensure the observance of law in the interpretation and application of the Rome Treaty. It will pass judgment on all alleged violations of the Treaty by a member state and review the lawfulness of the decisions of the Council and the Commission.

- (5) European Investment Bank - The Bank, with a capital of \$1 billion, will finance, without making a profit, by means of loans and guarantees:

- (a) projects for developing under-developed regions in the Common Market;
- (b) modernization or conversion projects made necessary by the progressive establishment of the Common Market;
- (c) projects of common interest to several member states.

The Treaty also has a provision of free movement of workers between all the nations by the end of the 12 years (transitional period) and by that time all restrictions for a person of one member state to establish in another state will be eliminated.

It is clear from this and the other provisions I have mentioned that, if the Treaty were carried into effect, the close economic ties envisaged would involve substantial derogations of sovereignty on the part of its various members.

One of the sources of strength peculiar to the Commonwealth is the degree to which it permits its members to make and adhere to allegiances beyond the Commonwealth.

Will this hold true if Britain in the sixties moves progressively into the European community sketched in the Treaty of Rome? How much of a strain will be placed on the Commonwealth association if the oldest and central member commits its primary allegiance to Europe and accepts the decisions of Europe's institutions of the future?

The answer to these questions are being pursued at this time together with the related problems which will arise for us in the field of trade if Britain joins the Common Market. We have made it clear that, while each member of the Commonwealth is naturally free to make its own decisions, the other members have the right to be consulted. That principle is accepted, and we have just completed a stage of consultation in an exchange of views in Ottawa with Britain's principal negotiator on Common Market problems, Mr. Heath.

We have also made clear our view - and this too is accepted - that, before any final decision is reached by the United Kingdom, there should be no commitment with regard to British entry until there has been a full opportunity for discussion at a meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers.

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