

GOVERNMENT  
OF CANADA



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION  
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INDIA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

I. Text of a statement read by the Prime Minister,  
Mr. St. Laurent, in the House of Commons on April 27, 1949.

During the past week the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, and the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs have met in London to exchange views upon the important constitutional issues arising from India's decision to adopt a republican form of constitution and her desire to continue her membership of the Commonwealth.

The discussions have been concerned with the effects of such a development upon the existing structure of the Commonwealth and the constitutional relations between its members. They have been conducted in an atmosphere of goodwill and mutual understanding, and have had as their historical background the traditional capacity of the Commonwealth to strengthen its unity of purpose, while adapting its organization and procedures to changing circumstances.

After full discussion the representatives of the Governments of all the Commonwealth countries have agreed that the conclusions reached should be placed on record in the following declaration:

"The Governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon, whose countries are united as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations and owe a common allegiance to the Crown, which is also the symbol of their free association, have considered the impending constitutional changes in India.

The Government of India have informed the other Governments of the Commonwealth of the intention of the Indian people that under the new constitution which is about to be adopted India shall become a sovereign independent Republic. The Government of India have however declared and affirmed India's desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and her acceptance of the King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the Head of the Commonwealth.

The Governments of the other countries of the Commonwealth, the basis of whose membership of the Commonwealth is not hereby changed, accept and recognize India's continuing membership in accordance with the terms of this Declaration.

Accordingly, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon hereby declare that they remain united as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress."

These constitutional questions have been the sole subject of discussion at the full meetings of Prime Ministers.

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II. Text of broadcast, delivered by shortwave from London, over the CBC by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Pearson, on April 27, 1949.

I am grateful for the privilege of saying a few words over the air about the Commonwealth meeting which concluded its discussions today in London, when, just before lunch, we went to Buckingham Palace and presented our report to His Majesty The King.

That report has now been made public. It is, I think, a document of historic significance. It is short and without frills; just as our meeting was short and without frills. Commonwealth meetings usually are because we can get down to business in these talks without formality or preliminary palaver. The report represents, as all agreements between a number of Governments are bound to represent, compromises and concessions to differing points of view. Also the discussions which preceded agreement were, I can assure you, characterized by that complete frankness which should exist between friends; by a healthy respect for each other's opinions; and above all by a genuine and strong desire to reach an agreement which would keep us working together in the future.

The problem facing us was a simple one to state, but not an easy one to solve. In a word it was this. Was our Commonwealth of Nations adaptable and elastic enough to include one nation, India, which was anxious to retain its full membership in our group? Our report shows that this can be done without altering the connection with the Crown as the course of our allegiance which the rest of us cherish and which has not been changed by anything that we have done in London. To Canada the Crown means no impairment of our freedom, but on the contrary symbolizes the continuity of our historical development and the depth and strength of our democratic roots. The King however, stands for something more than this. He is the symbol of the free association of the members of this Commonwealth of Nations. India joins with the rest of us in accepting The King as such a symbol and as the head of our Commonwealth.

Thus we all remain together at a time when, as never before, it is good for us and for the world that this should be so. No one who attended this meeting in London wished it to be otherwise, because this Commonwealth has proven that it is a strong agency for fruitful co-operation. We wish to keep it so.

Around the table at our meetings in historic 10 Downing Street and around the table when we dined together, sat the Prime Ministers from Australia and New Zealand, proud of their British stock and British traditions; sat also representatives of the new Asiatic countries of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, differing from the rest of us in race, steeped in another tradition, not all of whom were friendly in the past to the Commonwealth association when it did not seem to mean freedom for their countries. All three worked with us at this Conference in comradeship and goodwill. There was also the Afrikaner Prime Minister of South Africa whose wise counsel was of great assistance in reaching our conclusions. Under the

skillful, wise and patient leadership of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom we were all able to co-operate for a good purpose. We have, I think, strengthened our Commonwealth association, and above all, we have maintained a firm bridge, through that association between the east and the west.

Our Commonwealth of Nations is a dynamic not a static concept. Change to meet changing conditions but without impairment of its fundamental value, is the expression of its vitality and the measure of its strength. The nations who compose it, remain joined not by a written compact or by some imposed link but by other and stronger bonds; some by allegiance to the Crown, all by acceptance, in addition, of the symbolic position of the Crown, as head of our Commonwealth; all too, by our common belief in democratic principles; in the liberty of the individual. The rule of law, the extension of political freedom, the bases upon which the Commonwealth has been developed and on which it will grow stronger.

Diversity of race and culture and tradition does not weaken the strength of the association of our new and larger Commonwealth. In diversity and in freedom and in the free will to co-operate lie its strength. That seems to me to have been shown once again at the meeting which has just concluded in London, and at which I was very proud to be Canada's representative.

s/c