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CANADA AND BRITAIN IN A CHANGING COMMONWEALTH

Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs,
the Honourable Paul Martin, to the Commonwealth
Correspondents Association, London, April 21, 1967.

This is the first time I have made a speech in London since I became Secretary of State for External Affairs. It is, I think, appropriate that I should be speaking to an audience drawn from all parts of the Commonwealth. This great city is many things, but its role as centre of our world-wide Commonwealth association is undoubtedly one of the most important.

Over the years, the Commonwealth ability to adapt to changing circumstances has perhaps been its greatest source of continuing strength and usefulness.

The centennial of Canadian Confederation has provided a useful opportunity for Canadians to reflect on our country's future as well as its past. We have become increasingly conscious of the changes taking place both within our country and in our relations with other countries.

In recent years there has been a "great debate" about the development of the Canadian Confederation. We have, of course, an especially complex form of government in our federal system, in which power is divided between the federal and provincial levels. We have also two major languages, and a population drawn from many countries. As our economy grows, and our society evolves, I think it is to be expected that there will be some signs of strain. But I think it would be very wrong to view these strains as more than growing-pains, as Canadians engage in the common effort of building a better and greater country.

In a few days, Expo '67 will be opening in Montreal. Thousands of people from all parts of Canada, from other parts of North America, from Europe and countries throughout the world, will travel to Montreal to see this world exhibition which has risen, almost literally, from the waters of the traditional gateway to Canada, the St. Lawrence River. To Canadians, Expo '67 in our centenary year represents not only a birthday celebration; it is a statement of faith in Canada, and its future.

Preoccupied as we understandably are with our own prospects and problems, we Canadians are aware of the sweeping and far-reaching changes taking place in Britain, and in Britain's relations with the world. We have, of course,

been influenced by those distinctively British contributions to modern culture, the Beatles and "mod" styles. It is refreshing in a way to have British patterns invading North America. We continue to share a wide range of common interests in international affairs, a range of interests that becomes ever broader as the world grows more complex and interdependent.

In these changing circumstances it will, I believe, be most important for both Canada and Britain to make a special effort to understand the factors shaping each other's foreign policy. Only in this way can we maintain and enhance our traditional, intimate relations, which we value so highly.

We have just concluded the first meeting of the newly-established Canada-United Kingdom Ministerial Committee. The desirability of a forum of this nature was felt as a result of the increasingly complex and broad range of essentially bilateral matters of concern to the British and Canadian Governments. Far from supplanting our traditional Commonwealth channels, I regard meetings of this sort as a valuable means of supplementing and extending our relations.

The enormous changes taking place in the Commonwealth have affected the very nature of the association. Without wishing to underestimate the more traditional values of the Commonwealth, it is, I think, in the search for a practicable formula for building confidence among the various races of the human family that the modern Commonwealth has its greatest relevance to us today. The fact that the Commonwealth embraces so many differing races, in countries which nevertheless share, at least to some extent, a common language and elements of a common culture, gives it a great potential for contributing to international peace and understanding. It affords, perhaps, the most important political institution today for communication between the white "have" countries and the non-white "have-nots", and it has a major role to play in overcoming the division between the less-developed countries and the industrialized countries.

We see the Commonwealth Secretariat as one means of strengthening the Commonwealth in its role as an important link between countries with differing backgrounds and racial composition. By providing machinery to facilitate a broad range of contacts between Commonwealth countries, the Secretariat is making a contribution towards increasing the value of the Commonwealth association. The Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, and the various organizations of a specialized sort which bring together men with common interests have a similar, valuable function. The Canadian Economic Aid Programme is oriented to a considerable extent towards the Commonwealth Colombo Plan, the special Commonwealth African Assistance Programme and our Caribbean Programme -- and our programmes of assistance in military training are addressed to the Commonwealth. Such endeavours on our part, and the various large ways in which Britain assists Commonwealth countries, afford concrete attractions to the less-developed members to maintain the political association. It would appear desirable to continue and extend such measures. Canada, as befits its cultural heritage, is now making a comparable effort in the aid field towards the French-speaking states of Africa and elsewhere.

The Commonwealth has not been regarded as an exclusive organization. Its members have many interests which are reflected in the non-Commonwealth groupings and organizations to which they belong. For example, we understand and appreciate Britain's desire to play its full part in Europe, and we have been most interested to have a first-hand account from Prime Minister Wilson of his recent discussions with leaders of The Six. The decision whether to apply is, of course, one for the British Government to make, in the light of all the relevant considerations.

It is only fair to point out that Canada has important political and economic interests in the kind of arrangements which Britain's membership in the Common Market might entail. We have had an opportunity of discussing these interests with British ministers during the last two days at the meeting of the Anglo-Canadian Committee. However, should Britain decide to seek entry, it would be possible to determine precisely what the effect upon trade between our two countries would be only when the terms for British entry were known. The outcome of the current "Kennedy round" of tariff negotiations is another relevant factor.

Although our geography gives us a somewhat different perspective, Canada has, like Britain, a considerable direct interest in development in the continent of Europe. Simply stated, our interest lies in a stable Europe, whose internal difficulties do not constitute a threat to the peace of the world. Ultimately, this will require, among other things, a German peace settlement and an end to the present division of Europe.

Apart from the vital questions of international peace and security, Canada also has interests in Europe arising from the fact that it is the source of so much of Canada's cultural heritage. In this respect, I think particularly of France, a country which is recognized by Canadians, like Britain, as one of our founding nations.

Sharing as it does in the great traditions of French language and culture, Canada is determined to play its full part in the development of these special ties among the French-speaking countries of the world. In this endeavour, we are guided by considerations related to those which determine our attitude towards the Commonwealth, we seek to preserve, deepen and apply, to the broad purposes of our external policy, traditional attitudes which are particularly meaningful to Canadians. It may well be that the experience, particularly in the cultural field, which we have gained in the Commonwealth will be of use in developing these new Canadian interests in relations with the French-speaking countries. The institutions which give continuous practical expression to the Commonwealth, such as the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, can perhaps serve as examples of ways in which the bonds between French-speaking countries can be strengthened. Indeed, plans are already being made to hold a meeting of parliamentarians from French-speaking countries. In this way, Canada believes that its relations with the Commonwealth and with the French-speaking world can enrich and strengthen each other.

Until five years ago, Canada was the only independent Commonwealth country in the Western Hemisphere. Now there are five, and, in addition, six Commonwealth islands in the Caribbean have, or are about to achieve, a new "associate" status which gives them a measure of independence.

Because of geographical proximity, and other factors, Canadians have long had a special sense of affection for their West Indian neighbours, and we are confident that our long-standing relation will become more meaningful, and of greater mutual benefit, in this new era of independence. An important, practical step in this direction was taken last year, with the convening in Ottawa of the Commonwealth Caribbean-Canada Conference, which was attended by the prime ministers and chief ministers of all the Commonwealth Caribbean countries, and presided over by our own Prime Minister, as head of the host government.

We recently experienced a deep loss, when one of the most distinguished leaders of the Commonwealth Caribbean, Sir Donald Sangster, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, passed away. Sir Donald was a good friend of Canada, and was known by many Canadians; he was also a strong believer in the Commonwealth, and what it stands for in the world today.

I have been speaking of the changing nature of our Commonwealth association, particularly as it affects Canada. The conflict in Vietnam, while not a Commonwealth problem, is of great concern to countries of the Commonwealth.

It might be noted that Britain, as one of the Co-Chairmen of the 1954 Geneva Conference, has a special responsibility with respect to Vietnam, as have India and Canada, as two of the three members of the International Commission set up to supervise the cease-fire arrived at in 1954. Two other members of the Commonwealth, Australia and New Zealand, both situated in the area of conflict, are contributing forces for the defence of South Vietnam.

Canada has, of course, no direct national interest to assert or maintain in Southeast Asia. We have been drawn into that part of the world as citizens of the wider world community, and we have endeavoured, both through the Commission and in other ways, to use our influence in promoting the cause of peace in Vietnam.

It has been our position all along that a settlement of the conflict in Vietnam will require concessions on both sides. We should certainly like to see the bombing of North Vietnam stopped, but we should also like to see the infiltration of the South stopped, and we should like to see negotiations looking towards the peaceful solution of the conflict begun, for only through negotiations do we believe that a genuine solution can be found.

The situation in Southern Africa is also a matter of concern to the countries of the Commonwealth. The illegal regime in Rhodesia represents a grave problem for Britain and a serious challenge to the principles of racial co-operation to which the Commonwealth is committed. Indeed, it has been the dominant theme at three of the last four meetings of the Commonwealth prime ministers.

The Canadian Government, together with the rest of the Commonwealth, finds any regime representing a racial minority to be unacceptable as a partner in the Commonwealth, or in the world at large. This is why the Canadian Government, with the support of the Canadian Parliament, has been among the foremost in the application of sanctions against the illegal regime.

I have endeavoured to touch briefly on some of the major issues facing Canada and the Commonwealth in the world today.

In the midst of rapid change, the established and traditional relations among nations have a special value. But it would be a serious mistake to allow tradition to blind us to present realities, for the importance of traditional relations rests not on what they once represented but on the ways in which they can be made to serve our present and future needs.

I am convinced that the Commonwealth, so rich in tradition, must be seen in this light. The Commonwealth in its present form, far from being out of date, has a very vital role to play in our modern world, by bringing many nations, each with its own distinctive personality, closer together. We must ensure that no opportunity to have it play this role, for which it is uniquely well-suited, is overlooked.

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