



Statements and Speeches

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THE COMMONWEALTH – A UNIQUE INSTRUMENT FOR CO-OPERATION

A Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Don Jamieson, at the Royal Commonwealth Society Lunch, London, on December 6, 1978.

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...It is always for me ... a great pleasure to return to London, particularly so when I have the opportunity, as now, to speak to such a distinguished group as the Royal Commonwealth Society. Some weeks ago, when Mr MacDonald and I had the good fortune – at least from my point of view – of spending several hours together travelling to and from Kenya, we discussed the Commonwealth at great length and talked about its future and the impact that it may be able to have on world affairs in general. When he was good enough to invite me to address this distinguished body, I, of course, accepted at once, and I am very pleased that my schedule on this occasion was mutually satisfactory and we were able to arrange this get-together.

That was the easy part of it for me in terms of accepting. What has been, and continues to be, difficult for me is to know precisely what I ought to talk about in relation to the Commonwealth. There is literally an endless number of aspects of Commonwealth relations that deserve in each case rather a detailed examination and that, of course, would be quite impossible given the time constraints and your patience. At the same time, I consulted with my dear old friend and colleague, Paul Martin, who emphasized that it was a family affair and who advised me against a prepared text or any sort of learned discourse on a certain aspect of Commonwealth relations, and said: "Why don't you just give them, as it were, off the top of your head, some of your own personal impressions and some of your own views?" And that, therefore, is what I propose to do. In the meantime, I ought to say, parenthetically, that I hope I can avoid the tired old generalizations and the rather weary platitudes that we have been hearing over the years about the Commonwealth and I may say that I'm a bit of an expert on that subject. It suddenly occurred to me this morning, for the first time in half a century, literally, that my earliest, very first public appearance was when I won an oratorical contest as a young boy, reciting a thing called *Children of the Empire*. And, you know, I dredged up out of history this morning that particular incident and also realized, in recalling a few lines from it, how much things have changed and how important it is for us in these days to understand the distinction between the old British Empire, as we used to call it in those days, and the present Commonwealth of Nations.

I think it is rather unfortunate in some respects that some of the more articulate people on this subject have not yet made that distinction. I have a great sympathy and understanding for their emotional attachment to the past, and I am as great a respecter of history, I think, as anyone present in this room or probably anyone involved in international affairs today, and yet I think it is a real disservice to the potential that exists in the Commonwealth to seek to preserve it or to perceive it as being the kind of instrument that it once was in that distant past (and which, I think we can

all acknowledge, was an extremely useful instrument at its time and did a profound amount of good around the world). Whatever the downside of that historical perspective may be, we can only conclude today that the world is a far better place than it would have been had the British Empire and everything that it represented not existed at the period that it did.

One of the things, I think, that we have in common in the heritage that we have inherited, in a sense, from that British tradition is genuine healthy respect for what I might describe as "respectable compromise". One of the things that always disturbs me in these terribly complex days around the world is the disuse into which the word "compromise" has fallen if one uses it appropriately, because somehow or other, when one is described these days as being a "compromiser", there are overtones of "sell-out" or there are [a] sort of facets to the use of the word that are most unfair and quite inappropriate, because, if one looks at every one of the challenges that face us in international affairs today, if there isn't an element of what I will call "respectable compromise" introduced into them, then, of course, one gets a rigidity of positions on both sides and the end result is not very pleasant to contemplate. And so, therefore, I think that one of the things that we have learnt from our British background and from the Commonwealth experience is compromise, and also a kind of pragmatism that has enabled us to adjust to new and changing circumstances in a way which has kept the Commonwealth functioning and without which, I suggest, we simply would not be here today talking about this particular institution, because it would not have survived the kinds of trials and tribulations to which the chairman has referred. These, of course, were only a few among a very large number that have occurred since the decision was made somewhere back around 1949 to restructure and to give new vitality and a new sense of direction to the Commonwealth.

In that context, therefore, I think we ought to start asking ourselves: "Where do we go from here?"

One of the problems that I have in seeking to determine a specific and effective and constructive role for the Commonwealth is that I see it as now part of a proliferation of organizations around the world, none of which are mutually exclusive, and which bring into play and into being a whole series of different memberships by different countries. In our own case, for example, we have a very close working and practical relationship, and a most friendly one, with the United States, whose distinguished Ambassador I am pleased to see with us today. Therefore, in the North American context we are constantly literally on an hour-by-hour basis developing a kind of Canada/United States relationship. Similarly, of course, in Africa there are now not only such organizations as the Organization for African Unity, but regional groupings of various kinds are emerging, some of whose members are within the Commonwealth, some not. Southeast Asia, where our chairman has had more experience than almost anyone else in Commonwealth affairs or, indeed, in international affairs, is yet another example, where we have the ASEAN groupings, some of those members belong to the Commonwealth and are long-standing representatives of this organization and yet others who are not and who stem from a quite different kind of tradition.

And then, even within our own countries, the structure of them has altered markedly over the last 30 or 40 years. In Canada, for example, where we have had the very proud tradition of two founding peoples, the French and the English, we have since the war had a new infusion and a most valuable one, which now means that something over one-third of all Canadian citizens are neither of French nor English origin, and that number, indeed, is increasing on a steady basis. And so, therefore, the character not only of our regional groupings but of our individual countries is changing, and consequently we must, in the Commonwealth, be prepared, as we have been, to adjust to these new circumstances, to define new roles for the organization, so that it can maintain the vitality that we talked about back in 1948 when the new organization, in effect, was put into place.

In so far as I am concerned personally, ever since that day when I talked about the children of the Empire I have been an unashamed and unabashed defender of the Commonwealth concept. Whatever the form it has taken at any given moment in history, it has always seemed to me to be a unique organization and one that it was very much worth our while to preserve. Since I have assumed my present responsibilities, and, indeed, in all of the years that I have been in government, I have sought out every opportunity that has presented itself in order to advance the Commonwealth cause, not only for its own sake but for what it can do in terms of the world in general.

Harking back to what I said a moment ago about the changing structures, it will not surprise you — nor, indeed, is my experience unique — to discover that it has not been easy on all of these occasions to get the kind of enthusiasm and the kind of support for the Commonwealth that I believe is essential.

Clearly, as countries have emerged, as they have wished to identify more clearly their own character, their own sense of national purpose, they have had to, of necessity, re-examine some of their old relationships. There have always been elements within the various countries of the Commonwealth that have had a dubious linkage with, for example, the origins of the Commonwealth, and so, therefore, it has been for me and for those who share the same kind of views a difficult task, but it is one that is worth persisting in.

I believe that today it is probably, in the words of Charles Dickens, "the best of times" and "the worst of times" in so far as the Commonwealth is concerned. It is the best of times in the context that there are more opportunities now for this unique grouping of people to come together in support of worthwhile endeavours around the world; it is the worst of times for many of the reasons I recited a few moments ago — namely, that there are so many conflicting cross-currents at play, and it is exceedingly difficult for the Commonwealth to find its particular niche.

I think one of the dangers for us as a Commonwealth is that we try to be all things to all people, or that we try as a Commonwealth organization to spread ourselves so thinly in every conceivable kind of trouble-spot, in every conceivable kind of difficult situation, that we fail to have any impact anywhere, and therefore I have been arguing

in Commonwealth councils for some time that the most important thing for us to do is to ask in the first instance: What are the levers, in the most appropriate sense of that word, that the Commonwealth possesses? What are those powers — the influences which are identifiable and which then can be honed and sharpened to apply to particular problems? So once we know what we are, once we know what our strengths are, we can then, looking at the panoply, really, of difficult areas, ask ourselves which of those is an area in which our talents can be most useful and most effective. In so far as what our powers are, I think some of them at least can be stated quite simply.

There is unquestionably a community of interest within the Commonwealth. It is not something that is easy to describe. Indeed, I once said to be a group of my colleagues from the Caribbean that we ought not to spend too much time analyzing the Commonwealth, because in some respects it is a very, very nebulous kind of concept. If you really start to spell it out and ask yourself what it is that is holding all of these countries in this relationship and many hundreds of millions of people in this relationship, you start to get into the specifics of it, it is extremely difficult to understand why it has survived for so long. But there are certain things about its character that I think we can state with certain specificity, and one of those is, of course, that we do, in a way, stem from the same kind of origins. I think the traditions, the democratic traditions, that we possess in common are enormously important. There is the fact that we feel at home with each other. I had a gentleman say to me not too long ago that, even when he crossed the border into Canada from the United States, he had a kind of different feeling as a Commonwealth member, and these things, while they cannot be measured in specific terms, are enormously important.

Then, too, there is, of course, the fact that we do have a strong physical presence in some of the most dynamic parts of the world today — Africa being one, Southeast Asia being another — and in Africa, in particular, I believe that the Commonwealth presence and the Commonwealth influence are going to be crucial if we are going to solve the problems of southern Africa.

I have had the opportunity over this past year in particular, in concert with my other colleagues on the Security Council from the West, of dealing at close range with the Namibian situation in particular, but also, of course (peripherally but nonetheless importantly), with Rhodesia, and while I take nothing at all away from the five of us, or indeed from Germany, the United States and France, I think they would be among the first to acknowledge that the United Kingdom's and Canada's presence in the Commonwealth has added a dimension to that effort which is identifiable and which will indeed, if we succeed, prove to have been probably pivotal in bringing about a solution. I believe, despite the conflicts that are in play among the various countries, that the same can be said of Rhodesia. Once again, it is not easy to be precise in defining what those elements are but, if I may use a Canadian example, I think that Prime Minister Trudeau's close personal association with the Commonwealth, the commitment that he has had to it over this past decade, the friendships and the relationships that he has built with various Commonwealth leaders, have on a number of occasions been of great importance in terms of influencing, for example, some of

the leaders of the "front-line" states, who, in turn, have had a very profound effect upon some of the leaders of the various independence movements and the like. So, in that sense alone, the Commonwealth would justify its existence if we did nothing more than move that terribly troubled and perplexed part of the world, southern Africa, towards a more stable and a more hopeful future. I am told that there is to be a question period and I will be more than happy to answer specific questions with regard to southern Africa, or, indeed, anything else at that time.

I think also that, once again, although it is somewhat intangible, it is important to reaffirm the kind of moral strength that the Commonwealth brings to the world. In the past couple of decades at least, there has been a tendency for those of us who are in international affairs to have become hyper-cynical, to assume that power politics is everything, and that really the decisions are going to be made in the last analysis by those who have either the most weapons or the greatest amount of wealth or, to put it in crude terms, the greatest amount of "clout". I am not so naive as to underestimate or to dismiss the importance of power politics, but I believe that power politics devoid of a moral element will certainly not be in the long run beneficial to the West. There are any number of differences between us and, let us say, our Communist opponents, but surely one of the things that we must continue to bring to international affairs is a sense of morality, some concept of what is good for the world without carrying that to the point of evangelicalism or some kind of messianic fervour. In this regard, I may say once again that I have been enormously helped in the last year or so by what I regard as the addition of this dimension — or perhaps I ought to say the emphasis of this dimension — by the present Administration in the United States, because, if we do not have the example to show to the developing world in particular and, indeed, to those countries either behind the Iron Curtain or otherwise threatened by the Communist influence and encroachment, if we do not have the example to give to them, then in the long run we are not going to be very impressive as far as they are concerned, nor, above everything else, are we ever going to be able to hold them in concert with us when the going gets tough. So I make no apologies at all for looking upon international affairs in the sense of our having a certain moral imperative in our dealings with the developing countries in particular. And surely this is something which the Commonwealth has in abundance. That, while it is true that various forms of government have emerged within Commonwealth countries that have in a way established their independence outside of the context of the old British Empire, if one visits all of these countries, you can see unmistakably the residue — it is true, in some cases, the residue of what was bad in the old structure — but you can also see the residue of what was good and what was lasting and what was permanent.

And so, therefore, in terms of a developing Commonwealth, it seems to me that we have to understand and acknowledge that, while we must reach for what is good in the new, we must be daring and we must be broadminded and we must be accommodating in terms of various countries' differing objectives and goals in terms of their nations. While we are reaching for the new, we must also realize that there are things that are worthwhile and substantial in the old and that it is not necessary to destroy everything that is substantial from the past in order to gain the maximum from what

is good, or appears to look good, in the future.

Finally, in terms of these possible roles for the Commonwealth, it seems to me also that the Commonwealth is of enormous value in terms of what has come to be called the North-South dialogue. That here once again, uniquely in terms of all of those world forums to which I made reference earlier, the Commonwealth marries both the developed world and the developing world. It is the one place where there come together in a single organization countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, highly developed, with a great technological achievement to their record and a whole range of other benefits and experiences. It marries them and brings them together with some of the least-developed countries in the world and, for example, at a heads-of-government meeting of the Commonwealth, you have, as equals at the table, leaders from some of the most successful countries of the world industrially and some of those that have the farthest distance to go. And in that common experience and around that common table a great deal can be done in the absence of tensions and the like that is almost impossible to achieve in any other forum, and so I put the greatest possible weight on the Commonwealth and its organizations dealing in the whole question of what used to be called "foreign aid"; but what we are speaking of here really is in the sense of Commonwealth aid and then broadening it out into the North-South dialogue generally.

Here, once again, I believe that we have the chance to demonstrate by example that the techniques that we devise among ourselves are effective and are workable and therefore there are more people in other countries who are likely to emulate them. We, in Canada, for example sometimes wonder — and I do personally — whether our attitude towards foreign aid, in which perhaps to a greater extent than most countries we move on the basis of "no strings attached", no ideological commitments, we sometimes wonder if we are not perhaps being somewhat naive in this regard. But the fact of the matter is that by doing this, by saying that assistance to developing countries is something separate and apart from our wish to see them move in a particular democratic direction or whatever the case may be, we gain more respect from those countries and therefore legitimate influence on our part is more readily received. They are more open, when it comes to an issue that is of concern to us, to respect and to support our point of view, because (to put it crudely again) we have not sought to "ram it down their throats". And so, in this foreign-aid field in particular, I want to give every possible encouragement to the Commonwealth associations and, of course, particularly to the central office, which is organizing these efforts here in London.

There is so much more that I could say on specifics, but in many respects I fear that I am speaking to the converted and I know from experience that many of you are wiser in these matters than I am.

But let me end, as I began, by reverting to my concern about the proliferation of organizations and about the dangers that the Commonwealth can be caught in some kind of squeeze which will destroy its usefulness or, if not destroy it, then certainly dilute it significantly.

I believe that this can only be avoided if we have these clear-cut objectives about which I spoke. I am concerned when I attend various meetings to hear spokesmen for the Commonwealth – and I mean within different countries of the Commonwealth – advocating a variety of initiatives for us some of which, I suggest, if not totally foreign to the basic idea of the Commonwealth, are nevertheless a danger to its survival, and here I would urge all of you who have any part in various Commonwealth organizations to ensure that the sort of criteria I established initially of effectiveness and credibility are the yardsticks by which we move. I think also that it is important in the same context that we within the Commonwealth must be prepared to stand up and to oppose oppression and tyranny when it exists within the Commonwealth membership. There have been occasions in the past when, because of a fear that perhaps there might be some distintegration of support or some problems between members, we have been reluctant to make the kind of emphatic statements based on the moral principles to which I referred a few moments ago when a Commonwealth country has been concerned. We all know that there are offenders within the Commonwealth. Not many, I am happy to say. But we must be just as vigilant in so far as our own membership is concerned, and we must be just as prepared to speak up – as, indeed, we are when it occurs in some country that is not in the direct sense of the word related to us.

We in Canada have a very strong commitment to the Commonwealth. We believe in it. We believe in it as a working instrument. I think it was Sonny Ramphal who said that the Commonwealth cannot negotiate for the world but it can help the world to negotiate, and that is a principle to which we subscribe fully.

We also believe that we have a special relationship with the United Kingdom.

There are just too many of us in Canada who, like me, grew up with this awareness of what we then used to call the mother country, so much so in my own province, Newfoundland, that as recently as 20 years ago we were talking about the "home boat", the vessel that came each week or so from the United Kingdom. But there are too many of us who have that tradition, too many of us who are aware of the enormous benefits that the United Kingdom down through the centuries has brought to the world, to be prepared to jettison this strong element in our Canadian tradition.

We have of course, as well, that second stream which we regard as being equally vigorous and equally important and which, in a sense, by its nature illustrates the diversity of the Commonwealth and its capability to embrace all manner of concepts and various groupings of people.

I also want to say a word to this distinguished audience about Canada's attitude towards the monarch. In the recent past, there has been a good deal of talk (some of it, I fear, mischievous, a good deal of it ill-informed) about some of the steps which we in our country are taking to establish with clarity the role of Canada and its relationship to the monarchy. I want to emphasize with all of the vigour that I can here this afternoon that Canada has every intention of remaining what it has been for all of these years, a constitutional monarchy with Her Majesty the Queen fully re-

cognized and in every respect what that definition implies. There is a great love for Her Majesty in Canada. Not only is there a respect for the institution of the monarchy but I must tell you in all sincerity that Her Majesty has brought to that traditional respect a widespread affection within our country, an awareness that our country, Canada, and the Commonwealth are exceedingly well led at the present time in the sense of Her Majesty's personal presence, that she has a comprehension and awareness that are serving all of us well in the troubled times in which we are living. I have no hesitation in saying to you that I cannot conceive of any development in my country, either constitutional or political, that would be likely to change, in any way that is important, the role of the monarchy and the great respect, affection and indeed love that we hold for Her Majesty. And so this, too, is something which brings us all together, which is a common kind of heritage and background that we possess.

There are very challenging days ahead for the world. Sometimes I despair that we will ever be able to keep up with them. I commented to my colleague Cyrus Vance last week that diplomacy has made about a 180-degree turn in the last number of years. Whereas it was the role of foreign ministers once to travel to those countries which were friendly in order to reaffirm those friendships, today it is almost necessary to lob a few shells into a country before you justify a visit by a foreign minister and it is always a firefighting kind of operation. It is regrettable, therefore, that I in my capacity do not always have the chance to get to all of the Commonwealth countries. I have managed to get to a good many, but I never miss a chance to return here to London, which is the fountainhead of the Commonwealth, and in a very real sense reflects today its vigour and its continuing importance.

And, if I take one more moment, I would hope that the British Government and the British people will continue to have the same keen awareness of the importance of the Commonwealth that I have described as being important to us in Canada. I, of course, would not presume, in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, to tell Britishers what they ought to do or what their policies ought to be, but I think that as a member of the Commonwealth it is a legitimate comment for me to express the hope that the United Kingdom will not become so preoccupied with the events of Europe, so enmeshed in the new and unavoidable complexities of the world in which we are living, that the Commonwealth, of necessity, will have to take second place or play second fiddle. I realize full well – and who more than I, who must deal with the giant of the United States of America on a day-to-day basis – that Europe and your relationship with this part of the world are enormously important, but I do hope, as a Commonwealth member, that the United Kingdom can keep both strings to its bow. I believe that is possible. I believe that the United Kingdom can continue to enhance its relationship with the rest of Europe and at the same time can continue to work with us in a more vigorous partnership, and with the other members of the Commonwealth, to employ this unique instrument in the variety of ways that I – and I am sure you – see for it, in advancing the cause of peace and security in the world and the preservation and enhancement also of the principles which have brought us all here together today. Thank you very much indeed.

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