

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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A NEW CONCEPT OF THE COMMONWEALTH

A speech by Mr. J.G. Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, at a State Banquet at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, on November 28, 1958.

No one in my position could be but deeply appreciative of the kind sentiments expressed by your Prime Minister in that very moving and eloquent address. As you came near the end of your remarks, you mentioned that in my country the snow would be falling. I think you are right, and I can tell you this, having regard to the hospitality extended to my wife and myself, the friendliness of the reception that has been accorded us, the outstanding nature of the democracy which you maintain here in Southeast Asia, we in Canada will be with you until the snow falls and the frost comes in Malaya....

The welcome that has been extended to us here is of such a nature that it will always be among our most treasured memories and my hope is, Mr. Prime Minister, that you will not long delay a visit to Canada. Whether you come when the snow is falling or when the temperature is even higher than it is here in Malaya at the present time, the welcome that you will receive will be a warm one from the people of Canada who have a high admiration for you and your achievements.

I was very much interested in your recital of the resources of our country. As a matter of fact from now on I think I will take you with me, because you have a better knowledge of them, displayed with such readiness of speech, than I have myself. But as I listened to you enunciating the principles upon which this Federation is built - a common dedication of the principle of freedom, a realization that under parliamentary government, democracy has its highest fruit in those freedoms to which you referred, and in the maintenance of the rule of law - those are the things in which, distant though we may be in time and in miles, we have that abiding oneness that is representative of the nations which make up this Commonwealth.

I have travelled in the last few weeks, visiting the various parts of the Commonwealth and in particular I have emphasized the importance and the significance of the Commonwealth

countries in Asia and of their contribution. I am among those who believe, and I repeat what I have said on earlier occasions, that here in Asia the Commonwealth has a vital appointment with destiny and I believe that to the degree to which we discharge our responsibilities here, the Commonwealth may expand and develop as never before, and our two countries have much in kind.

You mentioned the fact that we are composed of various races. It is only 115 years ago that a great British leader, Lord John Russell, stated that it would be impossible to maintain the British family of nations if at any time self-government were granted. Another great leader in the economic and political science field, John Stuart Mill, said it would be impossible to build a system of parliamentary government in any country unless that country was homogeneous and had only one language. Canada is the first of the confederations, Malaya the latest, but not the last in this family of nations. We have in common two particular facts: one is that each has its multiplicity, if I may use that expression, of races, different in religion; each has been able to bring together in a unity of common dedication, races, varying races, which in other parts of the world have not been able to achieve in the past that measure of peace which is our wish. In addition to this, we practise the same democracy. You speak the language that I understand. Only today you spoke that language of parliamentary democracy as I met with you. If there is one thing above all others in which we in Canada pay our tribute to you and your administration, and to the people of Malaya, it is in the fact that you have realized the danger of an authoritarianism that challenges in all parts of the world, and are maintaining the parliamentary system, freedom and all those things that flow from freedom and are here in Southeast Asia acting, as it were, as an experiment for other nations to see what can be achieved under our system of government and democracy. When you mentioned the Commonwealth as you did, I could but say that we talk again the same language.

Trade Relations

Only a few months ago in the city of Montreal, there was convened a Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference. Two of your representatives, Sir Henry Lee and Mr. Tan Siew Sin, were present, and they have given you some conception of the things that took place there. I was among those at the Prime Ministers' Conference in July 1957 who brought before that Conference the need for something to be done to bring about the achievement of expansion in two directions within the Commonwealth - one in the field of trade and the other in the field of economic assistance and development.

As far as trade is concerned, changes have taken place as a result of that Conference. The United Kingdom has demobilized in considerable measure those things that made trade between us

difficult, if not impossible. Australia has done so, and if I may be allowed to say to you, Sir, we in Canada will deeply appreciate the announcement that you made this evening, that you too in this nation intend to take steps in that direction. In other words, let's expand trade, not exclusively within the Commonwealth, but let us expand within the Commonwealth. Let us realize this fact - that not only have we common traditions, not only have we a common dedication to the fundamental freedoms, but in addition there must be something more to bind us together. That something more is trade. At least it is one of the elements to which I intend to make reference.

The trade between Canada and your country makes it possible for us to purchase from you some \$27 million worth of goods a year. You in turn purchase from us some \$3 million worth. In so far as rubber is concerned, almost 80 per cent or even more than 80 per cent of the rubber that we purchase comes from your country. In addition to that, in so far as tin is concerned, the maximum amount of the tin which we purchase is purchased from Malaya and in order to assure the expansion of trade in that direction we have undertaken that we shall not purchase tin elsewhere than from the nations that joined together under the commodity agreement. That is the first step.

Colombo Plan

The second step is a step whereby each of us regards the other as his brother's keeper. One of the most important steps that has been taken among the nations who are dedicated to freedom has been the building up of that system that gradually expands year by year, and I refer to the Colombo Plan, whereby those of us who have been blessed in certain directions economically, find ourselves in a position where we may be of some benefit to other portions of the Commonwealth and also beyond the Commonwealth. Some years ago I was in New Zealand and Australia at a Parliamentary Conference attended by Dato Nik, as we call him, one of the delegates from Malaya. After that Conference, and having met with the representatives from Asia in particular, I returned to Canada and there advocated a large increase in the amount of Colombo Plan aid. I was in opposition then. Well I heard about that very frequently; every time I spoke of economies that should be indulged in, it was pointed out to me that when I came back I wanted to spend millions. Well, we came into power and the very first thing that we did, or one of the earliest things, was to give attention to the need of expanding and extending the amount of Colombo Plan expenditures on the part of our country. In the past few years, the amount expended has been some \$30 million a year. We raised it first to \$35 million a year; six weeks ago we announced that that amount had been increased to \$50 million a year, and for the next three years \$150 million will be devoted to Colombo Plan expenditures by the Dominion of Canada. That is a long step forward. It means this, that we believe that this Plan, enabling each of the nations to use the aid for the particular purpose of

improving conditions and making possible expansion within that country - we believe that in this manner we do our part for the building of that strength and that unity which must be characteristic of the Commonwealth as such.

I know that I have heard during the last few days as I have been in various parts of the Commonwealth, the question asked me, "What is behind this? What is it you will get in return?" "What purpose has this?" Let me tell you this. You mentioned our population of some 17 million, Mr. Prime Minister. In the past years we have devoted ourselves under this Plan to the expenditure of 250 million dollars. In addition to that, as I say, we have made further commitments for the next three years. As for trying to control in any way, to interfere in any way, to bring about any alteration in the ideas or the concepts and the objectives of the nations with whom we co-operate, we have no such intention. There is no reason for us even to consider the possibility. But we believe that this is something that we can do whereby we can join with you in our stand, that the first responsibility of each of us is to assure in every part of the world the raising of standards, the equalization of opportunity, and the assurance that men everywhere may have something of the better things of life. That is the purpose, that is the aim, that is the reason around which this whole scheme revolves. Freeing trade, removing those things that interfere with trade, expanding development, making possible that the nations, particularly within the Commonwealth, will be in effect representatives of what democracy can achieve wherein men, free men, exercising their God-given rights to freedom, may have an assurance that freedom can be achieved with security and that security can be maintained under freedom - that's our purpose, that's our aim.

One of the great resolves of the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference was this - a realization that we had a responsibility to each other. Secondly, there was a realization in the various parts of the Commonwealth that commodity prices fall away from time to time, to such a degree as to deny to the producer a fair and a reasonable return. We believe that those fluctuations deserve international consideration and out of that particular Conference came the resolve that commodity prices should be examined, commodity by commodity, in an endeavour to achieve an international commodity stabilization so that the economic welfare of those countries which produce in excess of their need will not be subject to intermittent fluctuations which deny a fair return to the producer.

We have the same position in Canada that you have. You have it in rubber, you have it in tin; other parts of the Commonwealth have it in other commodities. We have it in wheat. We have so much wheat in Canada we don't know what to do with it. As a matter of fact it piles up and while it piles up we find other parts of the world wherein the degree of sustenance

is below that which it should be. I belong to those who over the years have strongly adhered to the view that you cannot feed empty stomachs by the promise of parliamentary government. In other words, in addition to freedom you must also assure freedom from fear and freedom from want. Those things can only be achieved through the instrumentality of a co-operative enterprise such as I have mentioned.

In addition, out of this Commonwealth Conference came a decision to establish an Economic Advisory Council whereby each of us having representatives together will be able, by recommendation made by this Advisory Council, by researches undertaken, determine what course, recommend what course should be carried into effect. Then of course, Mr. Prime Minister, the decision as to whether it will or will not, must necessarily depend upon the political leaders of the various countries.

These are just a few ideas that I wanted to bring before you, something of the concept - a new concept - of the Commonwealth, a new Commonwealth wherein each of us is dedicated to the responsibility of realizing and discharging those things that will be beneficial to each and every one of us.

Sir, I came to see and to hear, I came here, Sir, particularly to have the privilege of listening to your wise and experienced counsel which has always been characterized by infinite courage. I came here for the purpose of listening to the views of those who know the viewpoint of Asia and in particular of Southeast Asia, so that on returning to my country I will be the better able to speak regarding those problems which each of us today, because of the shrinking nature of the world, finds it necessary to know, necessary to consider, and necessary to determine upon.

Mr. Prime Minister, there are no words to describe the feelings that I have for the warmth, the kindness, and the hospitality that has been extended to us. I don't know what it is but as I move around this Commonwealth somehow or another I feel that we have been able to achieve that which never before in history has been attained. It used to be said, it is sometimes said today that unless you belong to the same race or unless you have affinities in religion or unless you inhabit a given area where you have similar geographic or historical backgrounds, you have the beginnings there of strife. We in this Commonwealth have proven the contrary. Diverse in every way, we have been able to bring about that feeling of comradeship and brotherhood which I have felt everywhere I have been. We can see eye to eye; we have a common heritage; we have a common objective - the maintenance of peace in freedom. Let us march forward together in the future as we have in the past. We are the senior, you the latest in this family of Commonwealth nations. Thank you, Sir, for your message and everything that it has meant to me. May I now on behalf of the people of Canada extend to the people of the Federation of Malaya all good wishes for prosperity, happiness and above all peace with freedom.

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