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CANADA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

An Address by The Honourable Paul Martin,
Secretary of State for External Affairs,
to the Canadian Club in London, Ontario,
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There is an old parable about the cloak of Socrates. It is said that, in the course of his lifetime, Socrates' cloak was patched so many times that, in the end, nothing remained of the material that had gone into the making of it. And yet, though all its original parts had been replaced, it still retained its identity as the cloak of Socrates. Now the point of that parable was to show that an idea has a life, a validity that does not depend on the particular form it assumes at any given time. Surely, this is not without relevance to the nature of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth has always eluded definition. That is in part because it does not really fit any recognized category of international association. But it is also because the Commonwealth is continually evolving.

In that evolution Canada has played a key part. It has been said that "the present conception of the Commonwealth owes more to Canadian thinking and Canadian pressure than to any other influence" and there is a good deal of substance in that claim. From the beginning we have wanted to have the best of both possible worlds. We have wanted to have complete independence to pursue the policies that would serve our national interest and strengthen our national unity. But we have not wanted to cut our ties across the seas. Our position on the North American continent led us inevitably to reach out beyond our borders for a broader and broadening framework of association within which to advance our interests and make our distinctive contribution.

This is the basis of the approach we have taken to the evolving Commonwealth. It is why we have always resisted any conception of centralization or joint policy control, why we asserted our claim to separate diplomatic identity at the conferences that followed in the wake of the First World War, why we pressed our demands for a clear statement of Dominion status in 1926. It is also why we helped pave the way for the last major change in the constitutional form of the Commonwealth relation which was designed to enable India to remain in the Commonwealth as a republic.

There is no doubt that Canada's dual heritage had a good deal to do with shaping our conception of the Commonwealth. It not only inclined us to look outward, it also gave us a special capacity to help evolve relations which derived their strength from diversity. And that, as it turned out, was to be the nature of the Commonwealth relation.

And so I think it is possible to say that our conception of the Commonwealth proved to be forward looking. It was probably the only conception that could, in the end, have accommodated the non-British peoples of the Commonwealth who today comprise the vast majority of its members. The choice for these countries was not always easy. There were important segments of public opinion in many of them who questioned the wisdom of Commonwealth membership. That they nevertheless opted freely for the Commonwealth, that they saw a balance of merit in that direction, was to be a watershed in the evolution of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth as we know it today -- spanning the continents and lying astride the great divisions of race and wealth in the world -- has its origin in that option.

I should like, at this point, to revert to the matter of definition. Perhaps the closest we can come to a definition of the Commonwealth is to call it a partnership -- a partnership based on a measure of common historical recollection, on a framework of common values and institutions, but above all on a willingness to consult and co-operate on a basis of mutual confidence.

I say "above all" because I frankly think that aspect of our partnership is decisive for the future of the Commonwealth. The common recollection will fade. Some of the ties -- whether of sentiment or self-interest -- which form the basis of our partnership will inevitably weaken in time. We must expect the new countries, in particular, to develop values and institutions that will conform more and more to the special circumstances of their own societies. It is remarkable enough that we should have been able to achieve a form of association which has shown itself capable of accommodating the interests of 21 independent countries, widely distributed over the globe and accounting for nearly one-quarter of the world's population. But if we want to keep our partnership alive and meaningful, we cannot afford to take it for granted. We must strengthen and consolidate existing ties where that is possible. We must move forward to seek out new avenues of co-operation toward common objectives. We must give our partners a continuing stake in the Commonwealth.

Racial partnership is a case in point. Almost a decade ago, The Economist expressed the view that "the outstanding problem of the new Commonwealth, as indeed at longer range of the world at large, is the problem of racial partnership". In the intervening years it has become one of vital urgency. For, if we accept the value of a multi-racial Commonwealth, a Commonwealth in which nations representing different races, cultures and continents are prepared to collaborate in a community of purpose, then surely we cannot afford to leave any doubt as to where the Commonwealth stands on the whole issue of racial pride and prejudice. It is a challenge we have to meet, not only because it is central to our partnership but because the Commonwealth is in a unique position to play a part in enlarging the horizons of racial understanding in the world.

I am glad to say that that challenge is being met fairly and squarely. It was met in 1960 when, because of the repugnance with which her policies of apartheid and denial of racial equality were regarded by all other Commonwealth countries, South Africa was allowed to withdraw from the Commonwealth. And the Canadian position was of major importance in influencing the outcome of that issue at that time. The challenge was met again last year when the prime ministers of the Commonwealth were faced with another explosive racial situation in Southern Rhodesia. On this occasion, our Prime Minister suggested that the time had come for the Commonwealth to adopt a declaration of racial equality, to reaffirm the principles for which we stand in the Commonwealth on this matter. That suggestion was endorsed unanimously by the other prime ministers, and it was taken up in the communique issued at the conclusion of their meeting. In that communique, the prime ministers of the Commonwealth "affirmed their belief that, for all Commonwealth governments, it should be an objective of policy to build in each country a structure of society which offers equal opportunity and non-discrimination for all its people, irrespective of race, colour or creed". They also went on to express their view that "the Commonwealth should be able to exercise constructive leadership in the application of democratic principles in a manner which will enable the people of each country of different racial and cultural groups to exist and develop as free and equal citizens". I am sure that declaration marks a significant new advance in the evolution of the Commonwealth idea, which is certain to strengthen our association.

There was another development at last year's meeting of Commonwealth prime ministers which I regard as significant in terms of where the Commonwealth is going. Some of the newer Commonwealth countries proposed the establishments of a small central secretariat which could serve as a symbol of our common desire for closer and more informed understanding between Commonwealth governments. The primary functions of such a secretariat, as they envisaged it, would be to provide a broad range of information on issues of common concern, to assist existing Commonwealth agencies to promote co-operation in various areas, and to perform certain responsibilities in relation to future meetings of Commonwealth prime ministers and perhaps also other ministerial meetings.

That proposal has now been carried forward by senior Commonwealth officials, and I should expect it to be translated into a firm decision when Commonwealth prime ministers meet in London this coming June. The intention would be for the secretariat to be recruited from member countries and to be financed by their joint contribution. I want to say that the Canadian Government has approached this proposal in a positive spirit. We regard it as potentially very useful, especially in affording the newer members a greater sense of equality and participation in the Commonwealth. We are prepared to play our full part in the work of the proposed secretariat, and it is in that spirit that we have put forward the name of Mr. Arnold Smith, a distinguished senior official in my Department, as a candidate for the post of Secretary-General.

Of course, there is no intention in all this to bring into being a body that would exercise any kind of directing or centralizing functions within the Commonwealth. That would hardly be in accord with the present realities of the Commonwealth relation and it was certainly not in the minds

of those who made the proposal. The significance of the proposal seems to me to lie in quite another direction.

It is fair to say, I think, that the importance of the Commonwealth relation for the new members has been very much a function of the importance they attach to their continued relations with Britain. That is natural in terms of the historical evolution of these countries. But side by side with these important bilateral relations with Britain, the wider Commonwealth partnership has come to acquire greater meaning and reality. And I should say that it is to this mutuality of the Commonwealth partnership, revolving round no single national centre, that the new countries would like to see some tangible expression given at this stage.

There is always a good deal of soul-searching going on about the Commonwealth, and perhaps that is inevitable. I suppose I have done some soul-searching myself today. I should like, therefore, in the time remaining to me, to say something about the Commonwealth in action.

I begin with education. There is no doubt that education has been one of the strongest links in the Commonwealth association. Many of the leaders of the new countries were at one time or another educated at British or British-type institutions. This has helped to give the expanding Commonwealth the elements of a common framework of standards and values. Our common use of the English language has worked in the same direction. For language, as a means of expression, inevitably has a part in shaping the structure of our thought processes and experience. When Commonwealth leaders sit down together, they may not always agree with one another. But at least, if they disagree, this is not the result of a failure of communication between them.

The whole perspective of education is now changing. We are living in a more and more sophisticated world, which calls for more and better education at all levels. That is true as a general proposition but it applies of course, with particular force to the new countries. These countries are engaged in massive development programmes. The ultimate objective of this whole development process is to create modern technological societies. If this is to be done, human resources will need to be mobilized on a very large scale. And there will have to be fundamental changes in outlook and motivation. That is the real challenge which education will have to meet in these countries.

In the Commonwealth we have recognized the great importance of education, not only as a basis for closer understanding and contact but as an instrument of economic and social development, particularly in the new countries. We have devised imaginative and long-range programmes to promote Commonwealth education with these purposes in mind. Some of these, like the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, owe their origin to Canadian initiatives. In all of them, Canada is playing a full and active part. During 1964, some 1,400 Commonwealth scholars of one kind or another were pursuing their studies or training in Canada under programmes financed by the Canadian Government. Over roughly the same period, some 250 Canadian instructors were serving the cause of Commonwealth education in various Commonwealth countries. That seems to me a good example of the Commonwealth in action.

I turn next to the matter of aid. Of course, aid is not something that can be confined in a Commonwealth context. That is because it has always been recognized that there is a need to mobilize resources on a much greater scale than the Commonwealth itself is able to command if the task of Commonwealth development is to be tackled effectively. But I also believe it is fair to say that there has never been any disposition in the Commonwealth to look at this matter of aid in any exclusive spirit. That certainly was not the position taken at Colombo in 1950 when the first great Commonwealth initiative in this field was launched.

Commonwealth governments took the lead at that time because of their special ties with Southeast Asia. They took the lead because three-quarters of the people in that area were living in Commonwealth countries. But it was contemplated from the beginning that all countries in the area which were not members of the Commonwealth should be invited to participate on equal terms in whatever plan could be devised to lead to international action. And that is precisely what has happened over the years.

This is a point of more than academic importance to Canada. The problem of development is indivisible. It is crucial to large areas of our present-day world. The Commonwealth encompasses a great part of the so-called developing world and what we do there will inevitably have beneficial results. But the problem transcends the Commonwealth and we have thought it right, in particular, for Canada's aid programmes to reflect the bilingual and bicultural facts of our national life and the special capacity this gives us to be of assistance to French-speaking countries in the developing regions of the world. Accordingly, our efforts will continue to be directed towards increasing the proportion of Canadian assistance going to these countries.

Canada has taken a leading part in the development of aid programmes in one Commonwealth framework or other. Our contribution to the Colombo Plan since its inception now totals more than half a billion dollars. In 1958 we launched a specifically Canadian aid programme directed to the Commonwealth areas of the Caribbean. In 1960 we became partners in a Special Commonwealth Africa Aid Programme, which is a counterpart in Africa of the Colombo Plan in Asia. Our aid in all these directions is expanding. We recognize that this is the right course to pursue if we are to give meaning and substance to the concept of the Commonwealth partnership. It is also the course of self-interest. For we cannot expect, over the longer term, to assure our security or our prosperity in conditions where two-thirds of the world's population live on the margins of deep and dire poverty.

I said a moment ago that aid is not something that can be confined in a Commonwealth context. That is certainly also true of trade. Our individual economies in the Commonwealth are now much more highly diversified than they were at one time. And the trend in that direction is continuing. Moreover, our effective trading world has expanded significantly over the years. As a result, it is no longer possible for our various economic interests and requirements to be accommodated within any closed economic system. And so we have come to recognize, as members of the Commonwealth, that it is in our common interest to press for the freeing of world trade on the broadest possible basis, for a world trading system which enables each of us to meet our requirements from the most

competitive sources and to sell our exports in the most remunerative markets. That is why I think all Commonwealth countries are looking to the "Kennedy round" of negotiations, which is now in progress, to bring about a substantial lowering of barriers to world trade.

But there is another aspect to this issue of Commonwealth trade, and that is the position of the newer Commonwealth countries. Like other developing countries, they are concerned to conduct their trade on a basis which is more responsive to their development needs than the present world trading environment as they see it. That whole problem has now been taken up in the United Nations and other international organs. It is a complex problem, which is not susceptible to easy solutions. But, above all, it is a problem which cannot be solved in any restricted context. It requires a concerted international approach if there is to be any prospect of giving the developing countries a greater share in the benefits of world trade.

All this is not, of course, to discount the great value of the Commonwealth trading system. Certainly, as far as Canada is concerned, we have benefited from the operation of that system. I am sure that is also the experience of our Commonwealth partners. We stand ready to explore all avenues of expanding the volume of exchanges within the Commonwealth. We are confident that that can best be done in a framework of expanding world trade.

All these matters of which I have spoken relate, in one way or another, to economic and social progress. And it is right that that should be the focus of co-operation within the Commonwealth at this particular juncture. But we have also had to recognize that economic and social progress can be achieved only on a basis of internal order and stability. And so we have thought it important to help the new countries of the Commonwealth consolidate their internal order and stability by giving them assistance in respect of the training and equipment of their armed forces.

We have been training personnel from Ghana and Nigeria. We have offered a range of training facilities to Malaysia in the present difficulties they are facing, along with a gift of four transport aircraft and 250 motor-cycles for their police forces. We now have a training and advisory team in Tanzania to assist in the planning and organization of that country's armed forces and to provide the initial staffing of a military academy. And there will be another Canadian team arriving in Dar-es-Salaam tomorrow to look into Tanzania's requirements for military air transport and training.

I am confident that these programmes will make their own distinct contribution to the Commonwealth partnership. I am also confident that they will enable our Commonwealth partners to play a constructive part in the efforts of the international community as a whole to assure peace and security in the world.

I should like to end as I began. I said then that it has always been Canadian policy to reach out beyond our borders. The Commonwealth partnership has been one instrument of that policy. The North Atlantic community and the United Nations have been others. These associations have

brought us into contact with the problems and preoccupations of others. They have increased our understanding of other civilizations and societies. They have given us a focus for bringing our influence to bear on the world in which we live. The Canadian conception of Dominion status was once defined as "independence plus". We must now move beyond that definition to a frank acceptance of an interdependent world.

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