

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE LIVING COMMONWEALTH OF TODAY

An address given at the Commonwealth Trade Conference, Montreal, September 18, 1958, by Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker.

It is a moving and inspiring experience for me to add to the welcome already given by Mr. Fleming to you, the ministers and delegations from so many nations and areas within the Commonwealth.

The question has been asked me several times recently - what good can come from a Commonwealth Conference? What has already been achieved would more than justify this Convention of friendly peoples.

As members of a family it is natural that we do not agree on all things. We may even disagree strongly on some things, but after some experience in international meetings, it is good to know that whatever the disagreements may be, they are of conviction and judgment, not a propaganda habit or with intent to disrupt.

However, the world should know that in one thing we are united, or one thing there is no disagreement. We know that we are fortunate to live outside of the Iron Curtain. We are determined to stay there, and to that end to take action to assure that we shall. We are united in our determination that we shall determine our destiny.

This is a conference and a moment, to which I have long looked forward. This is a moment when representatives of our community of nations are gathered together in a common purpose. That purpose is to increase our understanding of one another's economic problems; to secure among ourselves and with others, the beneficent expansion of trade; to share in some measure each other's burdens; to extend the horizons of mutual assistance; to renew the strength of old friendships and form new ones; and to deepen our awareness of that essential unity in matters of the mind and of the spirit which characterizes the living Commonwealth of today.

You, the representatives gathered here, and your respective countries, are striving for prosperity and progress, not for themselves alone, but shared with other like-minded nations for this and future generations.

The Nature of the Commonwealth

The unity of the Commonwealth is in the things of the spirit and in a common adherence to the inheritance of political institutions. Its anchor is in the abiding values and traditions of the past to which is joined the dynamism of the present. Its strength lies in freedom, in justice, in the broad practices and in principles of Parliamentary Government - of government by election and consent - of government which respects the rights and freedom of the individual. Being a living institution, founded upon strong yet flexible constitutional principles, the Commonwealth can and does develop in harmony with new conditions. It can and does respond to the new problems to which new times give birth.

It embraces a multitude of regional interests in all continents. It reaches across the racial and cultural divisions of the earth. It provides a helpful bridge between the East and the West, and between peoples diverse in history, culture, language and creed. Its unity of spirit among a diversity of peoples provides the basic brotherhood to this family of nations.

The Commonwealth is a political paradox in that it accomplishes what it does without treaty obligations and so it must remain.

It is an association that is inclusive, not exclusive. It is ever-expanding with the emergence of new nations into independence. It encourages and fosters the independence and the individuality of its member nations, rather than conformity and conventionality. It has grown from the adaption of a world-wide empire of another day to the new conditions and attitudes of the century, and in doing so has become one of mankind's greatest hopes for the maintenance of peace with freedom.

Canadians are proud that the birth of our nation some 91 years ago constituted the beginning of this process by which the Commonwealth has emerged. Our independence was followed by that of the southern Dominions. At the end of the First World War, however, only 10 percent of the population of the British Empire could be described as truly self-governing. Since then vast changes have taken place, and in the last dozen years the structure

and character of the new Commonwealth has emerged. We of the pre-war association have been proud to welcome our Asian and African members and look forward to the accession of new members, not only from Africa, but from the Caribbean area of the Western Hemisphere.

The Commonwealth properly prides itself now on what it has done to facilitate the emergence of new nations into independence and effective self-government. The peaceful emergence of new nations since our federation in 1867 to the present time has been a triumph of British political genius and good sense.

Because the Commonwealth now includes such a diversity of countries, so widely spread across the world and so varied in their economic character, it reflects quickly and typically many of the economic problems of the world.

Within the Commonwealth there exists a diversity of interests, and even conflicts of interest in the economic sphere, but we enjoy a political tradition which has proven itself able to reconcile differences in the past, and which can bring success in the field of trade and economic affairs.

Trade is the very life-blood of the economies of each of the nations here represented.

Monetary Reserves Improvement

On the financial side, a substantial improvement in the monetary reserves of most of the nations of the Free World has taken place during this past year, including the increased central reserves of the sterling area.

The discussions about to take place in New Delhi provide hope that the resources of the International Monetary Fund will be increased. Improvement in the liquid reserves of the Western World should enable nations to meet the inevitable fluctuations of trade without recourse to action being taken that may injure the economy of other nations.

Freeing Trade Restrictions

We in Canada have urged, to achieve a larger measure of freedom in trade, that our Commonwealth partners in the sterling area, in their own interests as well as ours, should remove the discriminations against imports from the dollar area - discriminations that could be justified at an earlier period of post-war difficulties.

We welcome warmly the announcement by Sir David Eccles of decisions which should prove a considerable step forward in the direction of the desirable goal of freeing trade with the United Kingdom from impeding restrictions.

What is being done at once, and what is to be done during the coming year, should be of substantial help both to the United Kingdom and to those who trade with her.

We welcome, too, the indication that the Colonial authorities will be reviewing their import restrictions in accordance with the policy now being followed by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. This will be of particular importance to us in our relations with the West Indies Federation, with which we hope to develop closer and mutually beneficial trade relations.

The new Commonwealth nations in Africa, Asia and elsewhere have the constructive and far-reaching role of demonstrating that new nations, conceived in, and operating within democratic principles, can produce -- even transform -- standards and assure economic progress.

Colombo Plan

The Commonwealth has done much in aiding its members through the Colombo Plan, a typically Commonwealth scheme -- loose, informal, rather vague in concept and organization, but workable and successful in practice.

Canadians think highly of the Colombo Plan and have contributed thereto in expenditures and technical knowledge. We feel that under this plan, and through the similar work of the United Nations and the various Specialized Agencies, as well as through the most important work of the International Bank, a large measure of substantial aid must continue to be given in this vitally important field of economic development.

We intend to increase substantially the resources that we are putting into efforts to assist in economic development.

Commonwealth Financial Institution

I am attracted by the idea of a Commonwealth financial institution as a channel to provide funds, particularly to those countries that are newly emerging or have just emerged from colonial status to nationhood within the Commonwealth.

There are difficulties, but I commend to the Conference the objective of devising suitable Commonwealth arrangements to provide economic encouragement, more especially to nations as full status in self-government is attained.

In most, if not all countries, it has been deemed imperative to afford special support to safe-guarding measures for agriculture. We delude ourselves if we regard this as a passing phase -- it is clearly here to stay. The actions which

governments are impelled to take may harm the interest of farmers in other lands. As surpluses arise they are shipped abroad where interference may result in the normal trade of other nations.

Canada has suffered for many years from the consequences of efforts by other countries to foster their agriculture. We have had to take action, and the effects thereof have been felt by other nations. While trying to minimize these detrimental effects, it is agreed that they cannot be eliminated entirely.

To buy up surpluses from other countries entering our markets and seek to sell them elsewhere would not correct the general situation. The difficulty of solution is so widespread that no one nation can hope to overcome it by unilateral action, or in groups as relatively small as that comprised in the Commonwealth. It might, therefore, be desirable for all the nations that are substantial producers or importers of food to undertake in co-operation a systematic review of the conditions of world trade in agricultural products and the rules under which such trade can be carried out with harmony and good sense. The Government of Canada would be prepared to join in such an effort, for which the machinery set up under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade provides a convenient forum for a realistic discussion.

Food Bank

Out of such a review would come useful ideas to be applied in the setting up of a food bank. We must expect surpluses of food to persist and unless and until means can be devised to remove them from commercial trade and use them to meet the needs of those who cannot produce or afford to buy the food their peoples need for proper sustenance.

I would like to see a transfer of surpluses undertaken co-operatively by the major producing countries on a reasonably systematic basis. Emergency requirements could be promptly met from such stockpiles, and under-developed nations needing food would have a source from which to meet their needs.

Most members of the Commonwealth are concerned with the instability in markets and prices for primary products. This instability certainly makes doubly difficult the effective and orderly economic development of those member nations which depend largely upon the export of such products. We have joined in agreements to stabilize prices of tin and sugar, of which we are consumers, as well as in the agreement on wheat, of which we are an important producer. We stand ready to examine in detail, and in good faith, proposals for other agreements. We believe the wheat agreement has been of value, and we shall take a lead in seeking its extension next year, and the participation of the United Kingdom in it.

Education

Canadians feel that our co-operation in the field of education within the Commonwealth should properly be extended. Under the Colombo Plan and the operations of the United Nations and other agencies, there is an interchange of technical knowledge and skill, essentially for economic purposes. This was, and is, most urgently required to initiate and support economic development. I believe something more is needed in the field of education generally, over and above the private and official aids already offered to enable persons in various parts of the Commonwealth to study or teach in other countries of the Commonwealth.

I would suggest that this Conference give consideration to agreeing in principle on the establishment of a broad and reciprocal Commonwealth programme of scholarships and teaching fellowships, to strengthen the intellectual resources of the nations' members, to encourage the interchange of ideas, and to further the sense of common purpose and understanding in our younger generations.

Such a plan would provide for students and teachers to study and to teach in the schools and universities of other member nations and would apply particularly to schools and universities in the Asiatic and African nations of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth - An Example for Rest of World

These are but a few of the questions that occur to me as worthy of attention.

Ours is an age of crisis; ours is an age of challenge - a spiritual struggle for the minds of men. If despair should triumph, then right and freedom would fall before wrong, oppression and tyranny. But if the challenge of these days inspires a sense of dedication, of expectation, of hope, even of exaltation, in the possibilities of new achievements, then the forces of justice, freedom and humanity will rise to summits not yet imagined or attained.

We live in times such as were described by Dickens as he contemplated the French Revolution:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
It was the Age of Wisdom, it was the Age of Foolishness,
It was the Epoch of Belief, it was the Epoch of Incredulity,
It was the Season of Light, it was the Season of Darkness;
It was the Spring of Hope, it was the Winter of Despair;
We had everything before us, we had nothing before us.
We were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going
direct the other way..."

We live in such a period, but with faith in the right. Fortified by far-seeing action, we shall not fail.

Interdependence among the free nations, and not independence, has become a political imperative of this age. Indeed interdependence is the only sure foundation for survival. The peoples of the Commonwealth have a message for mankind, having learned by trial and error the secret of integration in a world threatened by the forces of disintegration.

I believe with all my heart that it is given to the members of this Conference to provide the means whereby the future of this Commonwealth will be assured, and mankind everywhere will benefit.

I believe that out of this conference will come a renewed unity and determination to exert in partnership with other nations of like dedication, and ever-widening influence for good among the peoples of the world.

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