



Statements and Speeches

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COMMONWEALTH MEETINGS — THEIR SPECIAL CHARACTER

An Address to the Closing Session of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Ottawa, by the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, August 10, 1973.

These rooms have witnessed in the past week a wide variety of views on matters political, economic and social. In that respect this international meeting has not distinguished itself from any other. Yet no one here would doubt for a moment that these Commonwealth conferences are distinctive. They are distinctive, I believe, for two reasons that were very evident in our deliberations this past week.

The first is the obvious dedication of Commonwealth leaders to the betterment of their peoples. Not here are there propounded — or vigorously defended — schemes or programs designed for the glory of the state. Here we are concerned with the dignity of individual human beings and the improvement of the lot of ordinary men and women.

The second distinction is a willingness on the part of all of us to believe that, should the policies of other Commonwealth governments sometimes appear misdirected or lead to disappointment, this is as a result of error, or inefficiency, or lack of discipline; it is not the consequence of purposeful intent.

In short, within the Commonwealth there is a willingness to help one another, and a willingness to believe that that help is genuinely offered.

Given those beliefs, this association is far different from those others to which we belong in various groupings. Here we are able to speak to one another with a candour unknown elsewhere. We are not reluctant to describe our individual weaknesses, our dreams for our peoples, our belief in the value of human life, our dedication to the ideals of co-operation and understanding. We are not fearful of admitting that we do not know all the answers, that our ignorance has led to mistakes, that our patience with ourselves and with one another is sometimes sorely tried.

In areas as diverse, yet as interrelated, as the flow of private investment capital and the operations of multinational corporations, on the one hand, and the plight of suppressed majorities in Southern

Africa, on the other, we have learned that our differences relate only to the means of attaining our goals, not to the goals themselves. Our arguments have been directed to the question of effectiveness — what will work, what is possible, what are the best instruments for serving our peoples.

We have not found specific solutions to concrete problems. Nor, I think, did we believe a week ago that we would. If this is a failure on our part, as some outside this conference suggest, it is a failure of our conception of this meeting. We find value in gathering together periodically because we believe there is merit in candid talk. There is no other forum available for this purpose for political decision-makers from all parts of the world. And certainly none where we all speak the same language.

If solutions have escaped us, information and understanding have not. Nor has commitment. Commitment to work toward solutions both co-operatively and individually. We have used this meeting as a place where solutions can be proposed and considered.

What we have learned from these considerations — and not complete to our surprise — is that we are not now able, no matter how firm our will, to solve many of our problems. We need more information for one thing. We need more boldness, for another. In the words of Prime Minister Manley: "We must develop the capacity to make intelligent judgments." There have been a number of suggestions as to how we might do so. If I have sensed correctly the mood of this meeting, there is a desire to search for the means. Surely we should not permit ourselves to stumble over the barrier of inadequate facts or statistics.

We need to know more about the costs of shipping and the effects of shipping conferences. We need to know more about the operations of multinational corporations. We have insufficient understanding of how to control the mechanisms which permit manufactured goods to be priced according to cost, but which force commodities to be priced according to the market. We are still woefully deficient in our knowledge of the development process, of the stimulation of growth and the absorption of aid, of the transfer of resources and the implementation of adequate controls. Although we recognize the advantages of airline links among us, and the impact on our societies of migration, we differ in our assessment of each because we do not possess sufficient information about either.

Over these, and over other of the factual roadblocks that we have encountered, I hope that we are able to climb before we next meet.

I should like to suggest that studies be made of these problems, perhaps by the countries best able to conduct them. The Secretary-General could co-ordinate these studies and ensure that they are concluded and circulated before we next meet. Our discussions then could proceed, supported by the foundation of knowledge so necessary for progress.

When we return to our own capitals...we shall be asked by our electorates what we did this past week — asked what we accomplished. We talked, we shall tell them. We sought, and gained, a greater understanding of the position of one another. We agreed again and again, as Prime Minister Kirk pointed out to us, that we would seek constructive solutions. We came to know one another better, and all of us regard this as good — good for now and good for the future, good for us as leaders and good for our peoples.

We should, however, be asking ourselves, each in different terms, if we possess adequately the resolve to face reality — to face reality as well as we speak candidly. In the past week, we have encouraged one another to face facts. But how many of us have in mind facts of a single dimension — a dimension that emphasizes our own national interests and diminishes the difficulties faced by others?

In one major respect, our deliberations this past week have been markedly different than in recent conferences. We have spoken with candour as we have in the past, but we have recognized that candour carries with it the responsibility of seeking constructive ends. Our intention to pursue such ends may well come to be marked by General Gowon's phrase "the Ottawa Plan". Without question, it is that constructive mood that has enabled us this week to examine so intensively techniques of burden-sharing. It has also permitted fresh initiative with respect to Rhodesia. To Prime Minister Barrow we are all indebted for the compelling manner in which he forced us yesterday to come to grips with that lingering problem.

We broke new ground at this meeting in our discussions of the business of governing. There is no graduate school to prepare heads of government for their tasks, no sabbatical refresher courses, no evening seminars or summer-schools. Unless we talk to one another about our experiences and techniques of governing, we are not able to broaden our own horizons. This morning we did talk, we did share and, I think, we did benefit.

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