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A DEVELOPING COMMONWEALTH

Notes for a Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin, to the Ontario Association of Rural Municipalities, Toronto, February 14, 1966.

I should like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your invitation to be present at this banquet of the Ontario Association of Rural Municipalities. I should like to express my good wishes and those of the Government to the representatives of the rural municipalities. I take pleasure in paying tribute to the zeal with which officials both advance the welfare of their own municipalities and serve the nation generally by an enlightened interest in public affairs.

My own comments on public affairs this evening will deal with the topic "A Developing Commonwealth". I have chosen this topic because I believe that Canadians are sometimes concerned about conflict between Commonwealth nations, about reports of serious dissension over matters such as Rhodesia, about changes in the familiar patterns of Commonwealth activity. They may ask whether we are faced with a declining rather than a developing Commonwealth.

I do not propose to begin by trying to define what the Commonwealth means in general terms or to trace the development towards the present relations among Commonwealth nations. We may understand the present situation better if we examine one or two current or recent developments.

I have chosen some positive and welcome developments to begin with. Canada is taking important steps to develop its relations with Commonwealth members in the West Indies.

We in Canada have a long history of association with the West Indies, going back to the years before Confederation. Our present trade is regulated by an agreement which is more than 40 years old. There are strong ties in the past, and they have grown stronger in the present. We look forward in the future to even closer links with these territories as they take over the direction of their own affairs. In 1962 we welcomed as members of the Commonwealth Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago and we look forward

to the accession of British Guiana to independence in May of this year. Three weeks ago, the Barbados Legislature completed the processes of deciding to seek independence, and I expect that a constitutional conference will be called this year. British Honduras has, I understand, comparable ambitions for the not-too-distant future. The other islands are progressing towards a wider measure of self-government.

We feel particularly close to the Commonwealth members in this Hemisphere because of the facts of geography and history. We are especially concerned that they should enjoy political stability, social progress and economic welfare. In anticipation of the coming of independence, Canada embarked in 1958 on a five-year programme of development assistance for the Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean. Since 1963 this programme has been enlarged and, as these countries work out their plans for the future, we are seeking new and improved ways of co-operating with them.

For some months we have been discussing with various of the Caribbean leaders the organization of a conference at which all aspects of relations between Canada and the West Indies might be reviewed. You will have noted that, when the Prime Minister paid official visits late last year to Jamaica and to Trinidad, the communiqués issued after his talks with Mr. Sangster and Dr. Williams referred to such a conference. Three weeks ago, a group of Canadian officials met with officials from the two independent countries and ten of the dependent territories to take preparatory steps towards the conference, which is to take place later this year. I am confident that it will do much to place our future relations on a sound and intimate footing. I shall not try to anticipate the results of the conference, but I know that Canadians all across the country share with me the hope and expectation that it will serve to strengthen further the Commonwealth as well as our relations with the West Indies.

I have started my remarks on the developing Commonwealth, Mr. Chairman, by referring to closer relations with the West Indies. You may ask how these developments are related to the central question of the position of the Commonwealth in world affairs. You may also ask whether we would not develop relations with regional neighbours whether the nations concerned had a Commonwealth heritage or not.

I would stress two points in answer to such questions. In the first place, the development of our relations with the West Indies provides an excellent illustration of the way in which the membership as a whole, or groups of nations in different areas within the Commonwealth, are co-operating in new projects of mutual benefit. The Commonwealth is no longer thought of only in terms of the preservation by individual nations, in their relations with Britain, of what can logically remain after independence. Nations are making use of what they have in common as a basis for co-operation of a new type, in which any member can propose collective action.

In the second place, it is clear -- and we can take the West Indies as a good example -- that some common traditions, long-standing contacts and political affinity provide very helpful conditions for the development of relations of the type we have with non-Commonwealth nations as well. When we think of the crises and alarms of Caribbean affairs in recent years, we would agree that anything Canada can do, by virtue of its own association with some peoples in that area, to contribute to prosperity and political stability is well worth doing.

Now I should like to say something about the Lagos conference last month, at which Commonwealth representatives considered the Rhodesian situation. This was not the first time Rhodesia had been considered at a Commonwealth meeting. The readiness of Commonwealth leaders in 1964 to face the question of race relations and issue a declaration of principle on racial equality went far to ensure the continuation of the Commonwealth as a meaningful political institution. Last month the question was again faced in Lagos in an even more explosive form, and again the members displayed their adaptability and their readiness to use the association for constructive consultations. Canada took an important part in the conference, as you know. At the suggestion of our Prime Minister, consultations will continue in two committees, which will have several functions. They will consider sanctions against Rhodesia, aid to Zambia required in connection with the Rhodesian crises and the development of plans for Commonwealth assistance in the large-scale training programme for Rhodesian Africans which is likely to be launched after constitutional government is restored.

These committees provide an interesting example of new Commonwealth machinery devised to help deal with a particularly awkward problem.

Although, as I have pointed out, there is a significant movement away from this emphasis, for most members the most important factor in the Commonwealth is still their relations with Britain.

This is only natural, when you consider the very brief career of independence of many of them and the correspondingly short period for politically significant groups to draw distinctions between their relations with the Commonwealth and their relations with Britain. Indeed, this is an important reason why the Rhodesian crisis is also a Commonwealth crisis, since some African governments have questioned the determination of Britain to suppress the illegal Rhodesian regime and lay the basis for a government in Salisbury responsible to the majority.

However, the members are increasingly coming to look upon the Commonwealth as not only a link with Britain but also a forum for valuable consultation and action among widely scattered and diverse countries. The late Prime Minister of Nigeria had this wider appreciation and accordingly proposed the Lagos meeting. Although Ghana and Tanzania have severed relations with Britain at the call of the Organization of African Unity, President Nyerere at least has

expressed the hope that Tanzania's Commonwealth associations can be preserved. His appreciation of the Commonwealth for the relations it provides with such countries as Canada -- I remind you that we are helping to train his army and air force -- no doubt influenced his attitude.

I might add that Canada is trying to diminish the damage to the Commonwealth from the break in relations by looking after British interests in Tanzania and after Tanzanian interests in Britain.

The Rhodesian situation and the Lagos conference have been, therefore, severe tests of the continuing interest of many states in the Commonwealth association. If this association were declining and if attitudes were generally apathetic, a problem as great as the Rhodesian one would probably have led to its abandonment by many states.

I am not overlooking what are still very considerable dangers to the Commonwealth inherent in the Rhodesian situation. What I should like to stress, however, is that African leaders who have been most critical of Britain and impatient over Rhodesia have nevertheless given due weight to the substantial and good features of the Commonwealth connection. In fact no country has left the Commonwealth on this issue.

I do not intend to list or comment on the many practical implications of Commonwealth membership. I would simply remind you, by way of current examples:

- (1) that by far the largest part of our expanding Canadian aid programme goes to Commonwealth countries, and that other developed members of the Commonwealth do a great deal to help the developing nations within its ranks;
- (2) that we are giving military aid also to several Commonwealth nations;
- (3) that, for the first time, a Secretariat was set up last year by the collective decision of members to promote co-operation and consultation (a Canadian is the Secretary-General);
- (4) that the Commonwealth Educational Scheme has promoted very significant contacts between Commonwealth nations and that new cultural exchanges have been inaugurated only last year;
- (5) that trade preferences remain from earlier years and that, in many ways not always well known throughout the world, there are clear economic and technical advantages to remaining within the world-wide framework of specialized institutions which originated in an Empire and survived to serve a Commonwealth;

- (6) that, in spite of reluctance in earlier years to consider joint measures in external affairs and in spite of the dissensions about the Rhodesian situation, there has been a significant agreement on action to deal with the illegal declaration of independence by the Smith Government.

It would be wrong to think of the Commonwealth as an association providing only for occasional consultation. On the basis of a new relation among its members, it is engaging in collective action in support of certain common interests. There are some examples which I have chosen, Mr. Chairman, to stress the substance of Commonwealth connections.

There must be compelling ideas also to guide the development of these activities. The most important political feature of the Commonwealth is its multi-racial character. By providing important links among many races, among nations in different parts of the world, and among economically-advanced and developing countries, the Commonwealth supports the United Nations in its work of universal peace making and economic and social development. The Commonwealth nations can scarcely hope to be free from the conflicts of interest found elsewhere in the world. They do not form an alliance or a tightly-knit regional group. They are unlikely to arrive at similar viewpoints on many matters of world affairs. Nevertheless, by means of their unique connections, they are able to do many good things -- good for themselves and good for the world.

This broadening of the racial basis of the Commonwealth has not ended the natural adherence of those of British descent to certain traditions. It has opened to them and to others wider ideas of political and cultural growth. This is particularly important for Canada. The chief external associations of the country must be meaningful to all the main groups in our population. I am glad that French-speaking Canadians and others not of British descent can benefit from scholarships which could take them to almost any part of a world-wide association of nations, and that students from elsewhere in the Commonwealth can come here to benefit from our French-language, as well as our English-language, culture. It is significant in this connection that at the Third Commonwealth Education Conference, held in Ottawa in 1964, the conference chairman was the Minister of Education of the Province of Quebec, the Honourable Paul Gérin-Lajoie.

It is also significant that, in recent years, as we have helped in the development of the Commonwealth, we have also extended and deepened our relations with France and other French-speaking nations. Many of the conditions of our closer relations with these nations are different from those on which our Commonwealth connections are based. Nevertheless, some basic objectives are the same. We seek to preserve, deepen and apply to the broad purposes of our external policy traditional associations which are particularly meaningful to Canadians.

In trying to analyze the nature of the Commonwealth or predict its future in world affairs, we perhaps create unnecessary complications. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that the role of

the developing Commonwealth in world affairs at present is not so difficult to assess. We must ask ourselves whether what is now being done or sought for in the name of the Commonwealth is worth while. I believe that, by any standard of national or international interest, the answer is affirmative.

I do not know how, in the more distant future, the Commonwealth may develop. What I do know is that, in recent years, since the multi-racial Commonwealth we now know has come into existence, the Commonwealth idea has been a beneficial one in the world. The decisions of the nations which achieved independence to retain important parts of an association they valued were taken in the light of a far-sighted estimate of their national interests. Britain was equally far-sighted in granting independence under conditions of responsibility and goodwill.

We have every reason in Canada to support relations born out of political sanity and commonsense. That is why we are developing relations with West Indian neighbours. That is why the Prime Minister went to Lagos to help achieve fruitful results in consultation, results in which his own efforts played an important part. That is why we are co-operating with others to bring to an end a situation in Rhodesia which threatens racial understanding in this great association of nations.

I am proud as a member of the Canadian Government to assist in the growth of an association of nations guided by generous political ideals. I am confident that the Canadian people share my pride.

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