



CANADA

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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THE COMMONWEALTH IN THE SEVENTIES

Excerpts from a Statement by Prime Minister the Right Honourable Pierre Elliott Trudeau at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference, Singapore, January 21, 1971.

This, as several of our colleagues have already stated, is a decade of change; it is rapidly acquiring, as well, the reputation of a decade of violence. We cannot prevent change. Are we able to contain violence? We must all hope that we can. In order to do so, however, we dare not pursue only the short-term issues, however urgent and serious they may be, nor dare we be content to administer only to the symptoms of the serious diseases that afflict the world. Governments will retain their credibility as instruments of orderly change only if we face up to the underlying problems.

Perhaps for lack of understanding, perhaps because a familiar problem, no matter how bitter, appears preferable to an unknown one, we tend in international gatherings to concentrate on the near future. As political leaders, we face competing and often contradictory demands upon the time and upon the physical resources of our governments. In setting priorities, the temptation, indeed the political imperative, favours often the immediate problem at the expense of the long-range, of the urgent as opposed to the important. Both, however, require balancing.

Canada concluded in recent months a comprehensive review of Canadian foreign policy. Our aim was to fix objectives and priorities in sufficiently long and broad terms to ensure that essential Canadian interests and values are safeguarded in a world where radical change can be accepted as a norm. We declared at that time that our external activities should be directly related to national policies pursued within Canada. Canadian foreign policy, as is the case with that of all states, is the reflection abroad of national priorities.

We are all familiar with the process of formulating long-range economic plans. The essence of such planning is the identification and definition of objectives, the assigning of priorities to the various objectives which have been identified, and the allocation of resources in accordance with

the priorities agreed on. In Canada, we have been following a similar procedure in seeking solutions to the major problems which confront us. We all know from experience that even the best attempts at forward planning often fail; unexpected developments may occur which can upset the most carefully considered plans. We know, too, that the allocation of resources to a problem does not guarantee its solution. Nevertheless, the methods we have been following in Canada may have some relevance also for the Commonwealth.

As we consider the shape of our association in the Seventies, we might, I suggest, reflect on whether we want the Commonwealth to become a miniature United Nations, where we spend our time making set-piece speeches rather than talking to each other. The former purpose, it seems to me, is already more than adequately served by existing international forums. As I see it, this unique meeting might more profitably be used for dialogue with one another, with the aim of learning from one another's experience, of broadening our understanding of the forces at work in the world and of co-operating in seeking ways of dealing with problems which are already looming over the horizon. We would all benefit, I am sure, through taking counsel together, seeking to identify the factors causing change in the world, and helping one another in seeking solutions to some of the issues which we all face. As I see it, there would be mutual advantage in concentrating less on immediate problems, which, while important, are for the most part dealt with in other forums, and more on the longer term, focusing at a stage where there is some prospect of influencing the forces at work, and well before the problems assume the proportions of crisis which threaten to overwhelm us. Some of these problems are, of course, economic disparities, racial discrimination, changing patterns of trade, environmental pollution and population, to mention only a few of the more obvious. We cannot deal with any of those problems of such momentous proportions by mere reference to them in a general speech or by short-term arguments relating to an immediate problem, whatever its urgency.

Perhaps we might consider whether at future heads-of-government meetings it would be profitable to spend the customary two or three days in a general discussion of the world political situation and the world economic situation. As an alternative, I think the Secretary-General might try to identify one or two subjects, such as those that I have just mentioned, which might be discussed in some depth rather than trying either to "cover the waterfront" or to argue a particular case.

Indeed, it is with such thoughts in mind that Canada was receptive to President Kaunda's initiative relative to those principles which might guide the Commonwealth in the Seventies. President Kaunda's draft declaration has served a most useful purpose in focusing attention in depth on this important matter and in helping to clarify in our minds what the Commonwealth stands for in the world and the principles which should guide us during the present decade. For my part, I am glad that Dr. Kaunda does not conceive a declaration as a charter or constitution, for experience, over the years, has shown how valuable is the flexibility which flows from proceeding by precedent and convention without a formal charter or rigid procedural rules. We support the idea of a Declaration of Principles.

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Developments over the past several years have shown that another significant way in which members can help one another is through practical schemes of international co-operation. Already, through the Colombo Plan and the Commonwealth Scholarship Program, the Commonwealth has shown how countries can co-operate to their mutual benefit and the betterment of their peoples. We have before us a number of proposals from the Secretariat designed to foster still further the advantages which flow from the Commonwealth association. In order to husband time, I shall mention in summary fashion Canada's attitude towards several of them:

- (a) Canada appreciates the Secretary-General's and various members' concern for greater "functional co-operation" in the Commonwealth.
- (b) Canada supports the proposed Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, as outlined. Canada will contribute the lesser of 40 per cent or \$350,000 each year for the first three years.
- (c) We cannot, regrettably, support the establishment of the special institutions for export financing and export development.
- (d) Canada does regard export promotion as a priority for many member countries, and is prepared to see the CFTC terms of reference, and its funding, enlarged for this purpose. To that end, Canada is prepared to pledge its support for whatever technical-assistance activities related to export development can be agreed upon.
- (e) Canada would contribute a fair share, up to \$2 million a year in a five-year period, for an expanded CFTC, if there is sufficient support for an overall \$5-million level or similar target, and as capacities to utilize the enlarged funding are developed. We should welcome the views of other members on this question. And we would invite the Secretary-General to take up this proposal with a view to developing specific proposals for officials to consider.

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Finally, none of us in the Commonwealth, not the populous, the large, the wealthy, any more than the small and the impoverished, are able to exist without the other. We are more interdependent than we are independent; that is the basic truth that faces us. We could, I suppose, get along without this Commonwealth opportunity, but we should not, I suggest, get along nearly so well. No problems will be solved by the break-up of this odd association; not one of us will find it easier to advance our own interests in its absence. The association benefits most of us and harms none of us; with Dr. Kaunda's guidelines before us, our relationship may become even richer. I look forward to that result.