

ADDRESS BY COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL,
MR. ARNOLD SMITH, TO THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY
ASSOCIATION, PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO,
16 OCTOBER 1969.

I am very conscious of the honour your Association has done me in inviting me to address this gathering. I have greatly welcomed the desire expressed by your conferences that there should be informal liaison between the forum for free and independent expression of parliamentary opinion which your Association represents, and the international public service responsible to Commonwealth Prime Ministers and Presidents which I head. Your invitation to me is a part of a continuing exchange which I greatly value, and which also goes on between Mr. Robin Vanderfelt and myself between your conferences.

I have thought several times in listening to, or in reading your debates, that of all the gatherings in which Commonwealth representatives meet together, this is one of the most wide-ranging, and certainly the least inhibited. Those who bear the title of legislators can claim to reflect what the individual Commonwealth citizen - their constituent - is feeling and saying about "the state of the association". Since in the last analysis this far-flung group of countries and people will stick together and co-operate only so long as the majority of Commonwealth citizens so wish it, a study of what you say is mandatory for those who value the association's future. I have been listening hard for the past two days.

Perhaps I might add that it is a particular pleasure to see here the representatives of the Parliament of Ghana. I had the honour of being in Accra as a guest of the Ghanaian Government at the inauguration earlier this month of the Second Republic, and at the opening session of the newly elected Parliament. It was a moving and historic experience.

I wish to put some thoughts to you today not only because you represent democratic opinion at home, but also because you belong to that select band whom mass media experts call "the opinion makers". Perhaps I should add in parentheses that I am not insensible to the fact that those of you who are fortunate to be part of a parliamentary majority also control the purse strings of your country's financial contributions to Commonwealth programmes for practical co-operation and development.

The January 1969 Meeting

As it was agreed that I should relate my remarks to your discussions on the future of the Commonwealth, I want to begin by contrasting the mood and content of the Prime Ministers' Meetings of September 1966 and January 1969.

At the time I described the September 1966 Meeting as having "elements of a cliff hanger" about it. These arose from the danger, precipitated by the Rhodesian crisis, of a fundamental breakdown in confidence between races. There were some searing moments and though

some useful and indeed essential principles were agreed, few of the participants drew great comfort from the proceedings.

The January 1969 Meeting was quite different. There was no less realism in debate: but there was a perceptible change in the "mood" of the meeting. There was success in achieving if not an identical approach to problems which had hitherto divided members, than at least mutual comprehension, some harmonisation of views, and some constructive planning.

The Rhodesian problem is still with us. Thus far, on this fundamental problem of racial justice, the Commonwealth, like the United Nations and the OAU, which are also seized of it, has not succeeded. It has always seemed to me that when international organisations (or the collective will of their members) are insufficiently strong to grapple with the problems they face, the sensible reaction is not cynicism about the organisations, which would weaken them further, but a determination to strengthen them. Heads of Government were clearly determined to strengthen the Commonwealth as one of the essential bridges between the races and continents of the world.

On the Rhodesian problem their agreement was summarised in the following two sentences of their Communiqué:

"Notwithstanding some differences of opinion on method, Heads of Government remained unanimous on the ultimate objectives to be sought in Rhodesia. They were more than ever resolved that, whatever the time needed to reverse it, the seizure of power by a small racial minority could be neither recognised nor tolerated."

More authoritative than my assessment of the January 1969 Meeting is that of a Prime Minister of one of the older members of the Commonwealth, who, noting that many Heads of Government had had in their minds at the outset the recollection of what he called "the difficult and dangerous" Meeting of 1966, said that after the January 1969 Meeting the Commonwealth was "back in business". Mr. Holyoake's optimistic assessment was widely shared. This does not of course, imply that the Commonwealth had really been "out of business" in the interval.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi described the atmosphere at the conference as "warm and friendly" and said she had found a general desire among member countries to find a solution to the problems facing the Commonwealth.

Prime Minister Gorton said that the Meeting (which was his first) had been useful, and much more harmonious than he had expected, and that he regarded the conference as well worth while.

Mr. Shearer, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, while noting his disappointment at the outcome of the Meeting's discussions on Rhodesia and migration in particular, stated that the conference had fostered "greater understanding ... of inter-dependence".

Speaking in the Canadian Parliament, Prime Minister Trudeau said that his impression was that "this Meeting was not only successful but significantly so. Indeed this conference

may have marked some kind of watershed for the Commonwealth. But most important, and here I rely not simply on my own observations, but on the comments of several veteran Heads of Governments, the Commonwealth Meeting appears to have attained a new plateau of maturity".

Finally, to quote President Obote of Uganda: "All the members left with a feeling that the conference helped to generate confidence in the concept of the Commonwealth".

The phenomenon of this international association enhancing its strength, at a time when all forms of international co-operation are being subjected to searching scrutiny, must be attributed to the enlightened self-interest of member States. National leaders have made the hard-headed calculation that it is in their interest to see the Commonwealth not only survive but become increasingly effective. If the pattern of self-interest is shot through with skeins of realistic idealism about the family of man, so much the better for us all.

Some of the Secretariat's Activities 1965-69

You will want me to say something of the activities of the Secretariat, and how we have discharged the varied responsibilities laid upon us by Commonwealth Heads of Governments. In establishing the Secretariat the Prime Ministers and Presidents saw it "as being at the service of all Commonwealth governments" and as "a visible symbol of the spirit of co-operation which animates the Commonwealth". Since, as they put it "consultation is the very life blood of the association", my staff and I were bidden to "promote on an increasingly multilateral basis a fuller exchange of views on matters of major international importance".

We were also given a number of other functions, many of them relating to assisting the economic development of member states. The responsibilities of the Secretariat were "to expand pragmatically in the light of experience, subject always to the approval of governments".

In the autumn of 1965, in the midst of a series of major crises within the Commonwealth, there was only a small handful of us, operating from the splendour and elegance of Marlborough House - graciously loaned by Her Majesty The Queen - to try to give effect to these concepts. Today we have admittedly expanded into the two wings of the building and into a neighbouring building. Lest you spring to the conclusion that some vast and costly international bureaucracy has been created - none of us would want that - I should explain that most of this apparent "expansion" resulted from a rationalisation of existing intra-Commonwealth organisations. This brought the long-established Executive Secretariat of the Commonwealth Economic Committee and the Commonwealth Education Liaison Unit under the one umbrella. Integration of course made possible a number of administrative economies, as well as some adaptation of functions. The unified budget of the Secretariat after the two older organisations were merged with us was significantly less than the preceding combined total of the three separate budgets.

In January 1969 Prime Ministers decided that a Legal Division should be established and that the Secretariat should have an expert in public health and medical education in order to help promote consultation and co-operation throughout the Commonwealth in these important fields. They also

approved in principle proposals by Guyana for a Commonwealth information programme. With the recent appointment of a Director of Information, we now number all-told 167, and the total budget is some £500,000 per annum. This is the administrative budget and does not include the Technical Assistance expenses which are met separately. This is indeed tight staffing and tight budgeting when set alongside that of other international associations. I should perhaps add that the Secretariat is financed by contributions from all Commonwealth Governments, related to their capacity to pay and based on the United Nations scale.

What do my staff and I do ?

Among other things it is our job to plan and organise Commonwealth conferences. Since I last addressed you in Ottawa in 1966, we have prepared the way - from co-ordinating views on dates, venue and agenda with 28 governments and preparing background papers, to filling the ink pots - for up to half a dozen large meetings a year, in addition to the frequent meetings on various subjects of Commonwealth representatives in London. Meetings have ranged from conferences of Commonwealth Heads of Government and of Finance, Trade, Law, Education and Health Ministers, to seminars of experts such as that held last year in this very city on techniques of teaching the "new maths". It is the Heads of Government meetings which get the headlines, but worth-while achievements also come out of expert seminars like the one on increasing foreign exchange earnings from tourism held in Malta. Next month there will be a regional seminar in Africa of youth leaders, to discuss such questions as how best to mobilise unemployed school-leavers to help in the problems of development. There is a good deal of hard work and expertise needed to prepare for, and to handle, these varied types of meetings, staged in widely differing conditions in every region of the world; and often more work and expertise are needed to follow them up.

Co-operation for Economic Development

Commonwealth meetings have often produced requests to the Secretariat to undertake specific studies. For example we are currently engaged, on the instruction of Commonwealth Trade Ministers, on a feasibility study of a proposal originally put forward by the Government of India, for Commonwealth co-operation in the field of export market development. The point here is that though a great deal of lip service has been paid to the concept of trade rather than aid, not much has yet been achieved. Quite apart from the problem of improving access to markets for the products of developing countries, much more needs to be done in the area of commodity arrangements. There is also, it was considered, significant scope for co-operation and assistance in such areas as market research, packaging and design advice, and active trade promotion and advertising. The intelligent application of some aid resources in this area can, in my view, make a major contribution to the fundamental task of enabling developing countries to earn more foreign currency for themselves.

That is merely one of a number of examples I could give of activities in which we are currently engaged. Another is a study on the role of private investment in the strategy for development over the next decade requested by the Meeting of Finance Ministers in Barbados two weeks ago. We are to pay particular attention to problems of double taxation agreements and possible improvement in such agreements to deal with the particular needs of developing countries where the earlier assumption that there is a certain balance in the flow is not applicable.

Quite apart from such studies, Prime Ministers have charged the Secretariat with a number of functions in the area of Commonwealth co-operation for development.

I should make it clear at once that such activities, in the development aid field, are designed to supplement and not to rival existing bilateral programmes, which of course are overwhelmingly the main type of aid, and the big multilateral programmes organised on a world-wide basis through the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies.

How important bilateral programmes are is shown by the fact that at present no less than 90% of total development aid is organised on a bilateral basis, and that the four rich Commonwealth countries have been directing some 85% of their official bilateral aid to developing countries in the Commonwealth. The Secretariat was given both a reporting and a clearing house function on intra-Commonwealth aid in these areas.

But Heads of Government also envisaged using the Commonwealth as a grouping for selective multilateral aid in addition to the important Commonwealth participation in United Nations and World Bank programmes.

At their meeting in 1964, which took the decision to establish a Secretariat, Commonwealth Heads of Government envisaged supplementing Commonwealth support already provided through the United Nations by some specifically Commonwealth activities "inspired by the common purpose of promoting the development of the Commonwealth by a co-ordinated programme of joint or bilateral projects". This is why they included in the terms of reference of the Secretariat, as set out in their Agreed Memorandum of 1965, the statement that we were to "assist member Governments, at their request, in advancing and obtaining support for development projects and technical assistance in a variety of fields on a multilateral Commonwealth basis".

It has been widely recognised by Ministers and officials of developing countries in the Commonwealth directly concerned with development programmes that it is often easier to make effective use of experts from other Commonwealth countries because they are already used to somewhat similar administrative, professional, and educational techniques, and of course to operating in the English language. It is beyond question that in a number of fields the cost-effectiveness ratio of technical assistance and training exchanges between Commonwealth countries is more favourable than between countries who do not share these similarities. Developing Commonwealth countries therefore welcomed the expression by Commonwealth Heads of Government collectively of the intentions I have quoted.

It is my duty to report to you now that the resources thus far made available to make use of these built-in advantages of a multilateral Commonwealth programme have thus far been slow and slight.

Nevertheless the Commonwealth Programme for Technical Co-operation, which is described in one of your data papers, number 17, marked a significant beginning. This Programme made it possible to use money from the three participating donor countries, Britain, Canada and New Zealand, to recruit experts not only from these countries but also from any developing countries in the Commonwealth, to assist other developing countries. It was formulated at a meeting held in Nairobi in 1967, and is designed to operate in situations where the Commonwealth relationship gives special advantages for meeting the planning, rather than the operational, needs of Governments.

In the past year a small group of experts attached to my Headquarters staff has undertaken assignments on technical assistance needs in the areas of national and sectoral planning, project planning, statistics, finance and public administration. To give a few typical examples of their work, they have assisted a Commonwealth country in southern Africa in negotiations on taxation, royalties and contracts with huge international corporations, and in negotiations with the World Bank, on development problems of a major new diamond industry, and of large nickel and copper deposits. They have helped a Southern Asian Commonwealth country in the field of research and long-term economic planning. Fiji has been assisted in making aggregate projections for their next planning period. Advice on reorganisation and development of statistical services and census plans have been furnished to Sierra Leone, Malta and several Commonwealth states in the Caribbean. I must mention that our expert on statistics is a former Director-General of Statistics of Pakistan, and he is financed by Canadian funds given to the Secretariat for this purpose. We have also been able to recruit and finance the posting for longer assignments in the field, of experts from some developing countries, to others.

When the Heads of Government met in January of this year, they endorsed the desirability of extending the principle of third party financing. As it is of such importance, I think I should quote to you their exact words:

"The Commonwealth Prime Ministers reaffirmed the value of specifically Commonwealth effort in certain fields. An example would be increasing application of the principle of third-party financing, as a useful mechanism for bringing qualified experts and important tasks together quickly and efficiently. Third party financing, by which experts from one country can be financed wholly or in part by another, can significantly enlarge the pool of expertise available for technical assistance arrangements by drawing on skills available in developing countries. These skills, moreover, are often of particular relevance to the needs of other developing countries. The Meeting agreed that early consideration should be given to the extension of the principle of third-party financing to education, training and consultations. This would allow students to be trained in surroundings and under conditions more appropriate to their future employment, and in this way ease the problem of the brain drain."

It is also clear that this can strengthen centres of excellence in developing countries. Not least important, it can help modify the awkward distinction between "donor" and "recipient". A beginning has been made in this direction, and developing countries in the Commonwealth have made very clear to me that they wish to see - and are prepared to support - a significant extension of work to this end. We have had many offers of training places and finance for fees and subsistence from developing countries to be used by students nominated by other developing countries, for example. I believe that this development, if carefully but generously implemented - and it will of course require foreign exchange also from the richer countries - can also serve to help counter and reverse the unjustified but disturbing

disenchantment among important sections of public opinion in many countries with the traditional concept of international aid as a one-way street. It can also help to give a forward-looking reality to the Commonwealth as an active partnership between all its members, to which all can contribute and from which all - including the developed Commonwealth countries - can benefit.

This whole question came under careful consideration at a Meeting of Senior Finance and Development Officials which preceded the Meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers in Barbados two weeks ago. Specific recommendations from this Meeting are now before Governments.

In its historic report the Pearson Commission, which had been appointed by the President of the World Bank to analyse development experience over the past twenty years, and to recommend world development strategy for the future, has expressed its view that the desirable "mix" of multilateral to bilateral programmes in development assistance, now running at 10%, should be raised to the order of some 20% multilateral to 80% bilateral. They have also recommended a very substantial increase in total aid. My own judgment is that within this 20%, the sort of multilateral technical assistance on a Commonwealth, as distinct from a global, basis should in due course grow to something of the order of 1% of total Commonwealth aid programmes. This would give modest but significant content to the expressed wishes of Commonwealth Heads of Governments, and put fresh sinew into the Commonwealth partnership in the crucial field of development. Developing countries want to make their own contribution to such a programme. Most of their contributions can be in local currencies, which would then be used to finance fees and subsistence at the training places which they would make available and of course to finance the local cost of experts from other countries serving there.

Political Co-operation

I have stressed the importance of putting sinews into Commonwealth co-operation, and using this association as one of the instruments for economic development. I do not apologise for this. Economic and social development is one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest, of the political challenges to our generation or the next. But economics, especially development economics, are a means to a political end of building a decent, prosperous and safe world; the Commonwealth is above all an instrument for political dialogue across the lines of race, region and economic levels which, if we are short-sighted, could fragment mankind.

One of the greatest values of the Commonwealth is precisely the opportunities it presents for frank and intimate political discussion among leaders of this cross-section of humanity. Important examples of this are your annual conferences. They offer to the members of nearly 40 Parliaments within the Commonwealth not only opportunities for personal contact, but also for that frank discussion without which mutual understanding between nations must remain superficial.

The Commonwealth, through its various instruments, is happily marked by the maximum of flexibility and the minimum of formalisation needed for efficiency. It operates in a variety of fields, with meetings of legislators, of members of the executives, and at the non-governmental level, with meetings of various professions. These meetings of non-governmental professional men are now being facilitated and significantly extended by the Commonwealth Foundation of which I am proud to be a Trustee.

At the technical level of diplomacy, the Commonwealth Secretariat provides an instrument for the multilateral exchange of information and views on a wide range of problems, as seen from the perspective of member countries in all parts of the world. In addition, we have from time to time been engaged, at the request of the Governments concerned, in exercises in good offices, mediation, or quiet diplomacy, on various problems deeply involving interests of our members. If I have not discussed certain sensitive political issues in this category this does not imply unconcern. On the contrary.

The Future of the Association

Does the Commonwealth have a future?

Some doubt it; others hope it won't. Many of those who have spoken here on this theme are sure it has. I share this view. I am totally convinced that the Commonwealth we have today can be of greater importance in the future than it has been in the past. This judgment is based on an appraisal, drawn from my own experience in this job over the past four years, of the fitness of this unique body to ameliorate and sometimes help to solve some of the problems lying ahead for mankind. It is much easier to destroy instruments of international co-operation than to develop them.

But it is not on this passive basis that the Commonwealth will serve its members best. The future of the Commonwealth will be what its member Governments, its member peoples and those who represent them in member Parliaments, choose to make of it. It will depend on the extent to which it is constructively used and this will depend on vision, realism and above all, on political will. If Commonwealth statesmen had been afraid of innovation and adaptation, the association would have died or become irrelevant decades ago. Like other institutions it is of course a product of history. But the art of statesmanship is precisely to use and adapt the heritage of the past in order to help build the kind of future we want.

The modern Commonwealth is no product of backward-looking sentimentality or nostalgia. It has been the product of a whole series of forward-looking decisions by statesmen concerned to shape the future. They have seen the value for this purpose of an association which can bring together, on a basis of relative informality and intimacy, leaders in various fields from so wide a range of countries, to listen, discuss frankly, and see what they can do together.

In your debates there has been considerable reference to regional co-operation and regional organisation. I have always been a strong believer in the value of these. Commonwealth countries are playing their part in regional co-operation in many parts of the world. We are meeting within the Carifta area; I have been invited to attend on Saturday the signature in Jamaica of the Charter of the Caribbean Regional Development Bank. The East African Community has been founded by three Commonwealth countries; consideration is being given to extending its membership to include other countries in that part of Africa. There is regional co-operation in the Pacific area. Britain is seeking membership of the European Economic Community, and if she succeeds it will be very much in the interest of the Commonwealth as a whole that such an enlarged European Community should be an outward-looking body, ready to trade liberally with

the rest of the world, including the developing countries.

It is important not to conceive of Commonwealth co-operation and regional co-operation as in any sense alternatives. Both can have important contributions to make to a responsible and just world society. It is healthy that countries should not feel they can belong to only one group or grouping. Just as Commonwealth African members are also members of the Organisation of African Unity, so several Commonwealth countries in this hemisphere are also members of the Organisation of American States, with whose Secretary-General, Senor Gala Plaza, I had the pleasure of a useful meeting in Washington last week.

It is in the common interest to strengthen, and where appropriate to enlarge, groupings for regional co-operation. They represent one basis for achieving greater intimacy and co-operation on a manageable scale.

No-one will gain however if the world became organised into a series of inward-looking, exclusivist, regional blocs.

This regional principle is not the only basis for achieving that greater depth and intimacy of co-operation which the world needs. In the course of history the sea has for many of our countries constituted not a barrier but a high road. I am not thinking only of the example of Mediterranean civilisation in the past, or of the North Atlantic community, or of La Francophonie (whose members earlier this year took a decision to establish a Secretariat for multilateral co-operation) or of Hispanic culture, or the Commonwealth, all of which grew on the basis of sea communications. I am thinking rather of the fact that modern communications have now carried much further the infrastructure of international contact, trade and co-operation which sea communications in so many cases began.

Today the world has become a village. Development and justice throughout that village are a matter of not only legitimate but of vital concern to all its inhabitants.

The Commonwealth is more than a hopeful preface to a world community. Its significance lies in the forward-looking use we can make of its heterogeneity, including as it does significant countries on every continent, of virtually every race, and at virtually every level of economic development. This heterogeneity is framed by the similarity of traditions and working methods which our countries share in so many fields: the organisations and techniques of public administration; the ethics and practices of so many of the professions; the similar background of much higher education; and the ability of leaders in government, the press, education and the professions to use English as a working language, though it is of course not the mother tongue of the majority.

I submit that the challenge which faces us all, as we grapple with the problems of world politics, is to combine the regional with the trans-regional approach. The Commonwealth is one of the more important instruments which mankind can use for this purpose. Whether or not we take our opportunity depends upon the decisions of Governments. Because we live in democratic countries those Governments can act only if they have support in their Parliaments. Indeed they may only act if they are encouraged to do so by their Parliaments. That, Ladies and Gentlemen, is the measure of your responsibility.

COMMONWEALTH
SECRETARIAT

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