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WHAT ARE THE LINKS AND LOYALTIES WHICH HOLD THE
COMMONWEALTH TOGETHER IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY AND ARE THEY LIKELY TO ENDURE?

PREFACE.

The British Commonwealth of Nations is an illogical, contradictory, anomalous conglomeration with such a vast dissimilarity of outlook, thoughts, customs, races, creeds, culture, sports and languages that its very existence as an organisation is virtually impossible to comprehend. How is this consortment consolidated and why is it that these free nations remain within the Commonwealth? Are the reasons materialistic or idealistic? Do these reasons stem from having a common background or history? In this essay I have endeavoured to answer all these questions without delving into a multiplicity of detail yet without, at the same time, glossing over those connections which I believe to be the most important. In short, I have tried to present a broad canvas of the links and loyalties of the Commonwealth, elucidating points which may not appear at first sight to be obvious and attempting to convey some insight into that essentially unpredictable realm of the future.

In answering the above question it is first of all necessary to define the word "Commonwealth". The Commonwealth is a free association of ten sovereign independent states, equal in status and embracing a common allegiance to the Queen of England as a symbol of their unity. These states, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaya and Ghana have by remaining without compulsion in the Commonwealth engendered a unique and enigmatical consortment of nations containing four republics, an elective monarchy, four dominions and a constitutional monarchy whose individual independence of action is not impeded in any way because of their voluntary association, as the Queen is merely symbolic and not a restraining factor. The ties then, are not political ties but both ties of mutual interest and those intangible, nebulous qualities which can be defined as loyalties. Examples of the former are economics and defence; of the latter, tradition and culture. These ties have developed gradually throughout the British Empire strengthening all the while until the Commonwealth as known today appeared. A commonwealth which has evolved through the centuries, a commonwealth with an almost infinite capacity for adjustment to contemporary conditions and a commonwealth still in the process of evolution. It is this ability for readjustment which has made the Commonwealth into the dynamic force it is today. Not a destructive militaristic force but rather a constructive unit which by attempting to alleviate social distress throughout its vast territories sets an example to the world thus being instrumental in procuring for it those desirable objectives of peace, prosperity and happiness.

Yet to an observer there are many surprising features about the commonwealth which emphasise the diversity of its component parts, the individual outlooks of members in world affairs and their seeming disability to achieve unanimity on many important matters.

Throughout the Commonwealth there is little which is common to all members. There is no common race, colour, creed or culture yet in spite of these more obvious disadvantages the Commonwealth is a distinct unit. There are of course some common features which have shown through its loyalty to the Crown in two world wars that the Commonwealth is far from being a decadent structure in spite of its looseness. All members are parliamentary democracies. All except New Zealand and Pakistan have bicameral governmental systems and all with the Exceptions of Quebec, South Africa and Ceylon have a judiciary similar in major respects to that of Britain, thus acquiring for themselves a portion of the tradition which is such an integral part of the British way of life; a tradition enriched through the centuries, one which has fostered among the Commonwealth members a community spirit and a sense of working for the common good. As a wine matures with age, so has this intangible, abstract quality known as tradition, bringing with it that equally intangible quality of loyalty.

As strong as the bonds of tradition and loyalty are it would be unrealistic to maintain that these adult nations convene together for these sole reasons. There are the more materialistic motives of mutual advantage such as economics and defence, both of which serve to emphasise the geographical

diversity of the commonwealth, the necessity for a capable intra-commonwealth transport system and the advantages of having a common currency with which to finance the multilateral trade, development and productive enterprise which is such a predominant factor in the foreign policy of any nation but especially so in some of the Commonwealth countries who depend upon trade for their very existence. It is in the economic sphere that the immensity of the Commonwealth is most evident. Here is an economic unit to which all Commonwealth members except Canada belong. Economics is a puissant force in world politics and because of its trading and financial potency, the Commonwealth as a whole must be considered as having considerable sway in world politics.

In the struggle between capitalism and communism the sterling area has been responsible for strengthening not only the Commonwealth, but the whole world, through its ability to conduct large financial transactions without undue effort. The sterling area's importance can be assessed by the fact that it is responsible for 25% of the world's trade.

The first effort to capitalise on the old British colonial trading potential was a system of Imperial Preference but this has today little of the originally intended commercial value for it provoked antagonism from foreign competitors. Imperial Preference does serve, however, to forge a Commonwealth link by the fact that it seems to indicate a family flavour and nowadays the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade has weakened the original scheme but strengthened, paradoxically the commonwealth ties.

Although Commonwealth countries are independent politically they are not so situated in financial affairs. They find it necessary to expand their industries, their primary production and in general develop their countries' resources. For such vast projects large quantities of capital were necessary and for this reason the younger members have borrowed from the British government and private investors. Such large financial interests in Commonwealth countries have greatly strengthened their bonds with Britain especially those with India and Pakistan who have benefitted by the "Export Credits Guarantee Department". To cater for such large demands many organisations have been set up with London as the natural centre of Commonwealth financial affairs. Here are situated the gold and dollar reserves, the headquarters of a private firm entitled the "Commonwealth Development Finance Company" and the great loan facilities open to commonwealth members through the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to which organisations the only commonwealth member not belonging is New Zealand.

As the Commonwealth is such a large and powerful economic structure it has been necessary to establish various advisory committees such as the Commonwealth Economics Committee, the Economic Council for Asia and the Far East and the Overseas European Economic Commission to control this power.

It is a typical feature of the Commonwealth outlook that its economic aims should be dedicated to the raising of world living standards thus removing the causes of disturbances throughout the world and with them the threat of total warfare

which is such an imminent danger. This result can only be achieved when the Commonwealth economic policies of stabilizing multilateral trade, increasing individual internal economic strength and by organising an international trade and payments scheme are accepted as world standards.

Perhaps the best example of Commonwealth and world co-operation towards achieving better world living conditions is the scheme first inaugurated at Colombo with the view of friendly co-existence with the underdeveloped lands. This scheme has led to these lands receiving aid in all possible spheres, from the wealthier countries, to the extent of many millions of pounds and helps the less developed commonwealth countries to help themselves.

So it is that the Commonwealth can claim for itself much credit against poverty in the never ending struggle between the "haves" and the "have nots". By participating in these creditable schemes the Commonwealth has not only become more unified than ever, having now a common aim, but has drawn into its sphere, functionally at least, many other nations with similar objectives of peace and goodwill.

In defence, unlike finance there is no commonwealth bloc or a common policy but this does not mean that there is no intra-commonwealth co-operation, consultation or communication on these matters. Indeed, there is a constant flow of information which has resulted in a close liaison among the high-ranking armed services personnel of all member nations, which culminates in an annual Imperial General staff conference attended by officers from all commonwealth countries. These

conferences promote combined action such as that seen during the recent World War and Commonwealth Division in Korea, if it is considered desirable and the decision is unanimous, but otherwise they serve to clarify each participating member's position in any particular event to the others. Evidence as to the extent of Commonwealth co-operation on defensive matters can be seen by such agreements as to the interchangeability of officers, combined commonwealth combat unit practices, commonwealth military training schools, the use of Woomera as a commonwealth atomic weapons testing station, the Canadian pilot-training scheme and the standardisation of weapons and equipment within the Commonwealth. These schemes have the effect of enabling the Commonwealth to amalgamate into a great defence unit against aggression, should the need arise, at very short notice and with the minimum of bother. Recent evidence of this was the Korean war where the commonwealth units played an important role.

As it does in trade, geography plays an important part in Commonwealth defence. All commonwealth member nations have found it necessary to enter into regional defence pacts and other organisations of an international nature due to the inaccessibility of Britain, especially in times of danger where communications can be blocked or interfered with. These agreements have not, as was feared, caused the disintegration of the Commonwealth but have, as in economics, had the converse affect of binding other nations to it. The United Nations is the only organisation to which all members belong and it is typical of the freedom within the Commonwealth and its family

nature that members have expressed there, their own views sometimes in direct opposition to other commonwealth members without fear of official condemnation from their fellows. In the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation are the United Kingdom and Canada. New Zealand and Australia are bound by the A.N.Z.U.S. agreement to the United States. The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Pakistan are united by the South East Asia Treaty Organisation. The United Kingdom and Pakistan are both in the Bagdad Pact and Canada is allied to the United States under the North American Air Defence Command. India, because of her proximity to great communist powers, has chosen a policy of neutrality as has done South Africa for different reasons, but the latter has guaranteed the use of Simonstown naval base whether she is neutral or participating as an ally in the event of war.

So it can be seen then that lacking a common foreign or defence policy does not hamper the Commonwealth, but actually aids it as the members as individuals are capable of bringing their friends into a type of co-existence which could not exist if Britain stated a policy to be followed by all members.

One of the most important points about the Commonwealth is that of consultation, which implies equality in status as well as independence. There are many standing methods of communication ranging from personal meetings of the prime ministers, ministerial representation abroad and High Commissioners to the more wonted forms such as telephones, cables and radio. There is also a parliamentary association which provides for the exchange of information and visits among Commonwealth members of

parliament. Other more important organisations for commonwealth information are the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Commonwealth Liaison Department both of which serve to keep the governments of member countries fully informed on relative affairs. With the use of all modern means such as shipping, air and land transport the commonwealth is kept well informed.

Consultation within the Commonwealth takes place on several levels similar to those first mentioned in connection with communication. At the Prime Ministers' Conferences there are, however, some important deviations of form from the usual international conclaves which serve to emphasise the family nature of the Commonwealth. For these there is no formal agenda, no formal announcements are published and the meetings are held more with the object of clarifying each member's views than with the intention of treaty making. These conferences generally break up into small informal discussion groups which are probably a more effective way of settling disputes than formality. Thus the accent is less on ceremony than utility and friendship. These meetings are supported by similar conferences of ministerial rank but the main work and everyday consultation is carried out by the High Commissioners.

These intra-commonwealth relations have been greatly facilitated by faster, more efficient transport services which form an effective link. However, the mere fact of constant communication backed up with plenty of information is conducive to good diplomatic relations especially as the members are left under no delusions as to another member's difficulties in any

particular crises or situation so that an equitable compromise can usually be reached. This flow of information on all levels, on all subjects and at all times, has been an important factor in the Commonwealth's success of giving its members independence of action and equal status without losing at the same time the ability at any specified time to re-integrate for a common need or purpose.

Although political relations were formerly the most important they have today been superseded by those of a scientific, technological and educational nature which enables the dissemination of ideas and ideals throughout the Commonwealth. In this field there are many contacts providing for the exchange of scientific data, scholars and students such as the Nuffield Foundation, Rhodes Trust, British Commonwealth Scientific Offices and various other standing organisations. Conferences on scientific and educational matters are held regularly, teacher exchange schemes have been instituted and bursaries are available for overseas higher education. All these efforts have been very effective by instilling in the young people of the Commonwealth a broader view of life, enabling them to realise that men are in fact equal intellectually, morally, and physically regardless of race, colour or creed. It is this realisation that is a necessary part of today's world for understanding other peoples and it is in the Commonwealth, with its wide canvas of life in all aspects that racial tolerance should be attained. The commonwealth as a composite structure contains almost all factions to be found in race, in customs, in culture, religion and language yet it has survived

many ordeals threatening to disrupt its unity.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth, like all family groups, has had disputes endangering its unity. These disputes are of a varied nature but the most threatening are those concerning racial discrimination and territorial expansion. The South African policy of Apartheid pleases very few people. It does not please the "coloured" races under it and it displeases the Asians in principle who are ardent believers in equality. The South African anti-Indian laws have caused the breaking of relations between the two countries and is a tender spot. The "white" Australia and New Zealand policies are too being eyed unfavourably by the overpopulated and underfed Asian countries. Another bone of contention is that now the power of the hugely populated Asian countries such as India and Pakistan is becoming evident and no longer can a "white" country feel superior to the might which is gradually building up. Other problems to unity are the territorial desires of India, Pakistan and South Africa. Britain's dislike of the policy of apartheid is well known and it is because of this that Britain has refused to give jurisdiction to South Africa over the British African protectorates. This problem, however, is not as important as that of Kashmir. Who is to have control of that important strategic and economic state? Is it to be India or Pakistan? Hindus rule it yet there is a moslem majority. This is a significant factor for Pakistan has a very real moral claim and when both sides feel they are in the right, quarrels sometimes assume gigantic proportions and cause much ill-feeling. Although the matter has been under consideration in the United Nations for some time

it seems unlikely to be solved in the near future and will therefore continue as a source of grievance to both sides.

The anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism which is so prevalent in Asia is, too, another problem and source of discontent which was very significant when, in the Suez crisis, they refused to assist Britain for that reason.

Indian neutrality too is sometimes a sore point. It seemed indicative of an Indian desire to leave the Commonwealth but an unwillingness to take such action. This policy of appeasement has been at times extremely frustrating to other members, but can be condoned due to the difficulty of its geographical nature.

However, in spite of these gloomy speculations the future prospects seem fairly bright. The Commonwealth as it is a capitalistic system has a common enemy in communism. It is this fear of communist infiltration that gives the Commonwealth a common front and recent happenings in Tibet and India indicate that India will drop her policy of neutralism and declare herself firmly against communism on any further provocation from Communist China.

There are several reasons why the Commonwealth will endure even in the face of the aforementioned problems and they are that there is always the possibility that collective security in the United Nations may fail miserably, that members' association in the Commonwealth is a distinct economic advantage, there is a definite family feeling and the bonds of tradition are more tenacious than they appear on the face of things and lastly there is the adaptability of the Commonwealth or its

evolutionary ability.

So it can be seen that the Commonwealth is held together by many links and loyalties of economics, defence, foreign affairs, consultative, co-operative, cultural, technological, scientific and educational. There is even the Commonwealth sport of cricket and the Empire Games. The Commonwealth has common problems, likes and dislikes, but above all it has the mutual enemies of poverty, despair, hate, war and communism and in the event of internal problems, there is a standing machinery for consultation and arbitration which is such an important factor in the Commonwealth structure.

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