ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY ESSAY COMPETITION 1984/5

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Confidential - student own work.
St. Augustine Girls' High School

[Signature]
Principal

To the point,
Well expressed & org.
Good entry

[Stamp]
ST. AUGUSTINE GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL
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TRINIDAD
WEST INDIES
Question 3: "If the Commonwealth does nothing more than give the world a lead in establishing the brotherhood of man, irrespective of race, creed or colour, it will have made a notable contribution to the cause of human welfare." (Haqarat Ali Khan, former Prime Minister of Pakistan. How far has the Commonwealth progressed toward this goal? What is causing delay?

The Commonwealth is the term used to describe the free association which emerged from the British Empire and its former colonies. Today, its membership encompasses over forty nations, and it brings together diverse racial and economic systems with different goals. In the light of the above quotation, it is important that certain relevant facts be mentioned. The Commonwealth is unique in that it is the only sovereign organization which has developed out of a former empire — it is in fact the link which all the nations have with Britain that is a primary reason for its survival. The member states have in common the English language and the British parliamentary democratic system (except for some African countries and Grenada before the Maurice Bishop regime was overthrown). This serves to show the bonds which exist between all member states and perhaps justifies one speculation that the Commonwealth is more of a family than any other worldwide organization. What better way to promote the brotherhood of man than by beginning in a family? This is precisely what the Commonwealth is aiming to prove. The human rights issue is one of fundamental importance to every being on this planet, and almost every question being discussed today by the world's leaders revert to this main theme. The Commonwealth is at this time preoccupied with the issues dealing with peace and brotherhood — the aim to find a new international economic order, to close the ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor nations, and to
encourage international interdependence and co-operation.

With reference to these goals, it can be seen that the Commonwealth has indeed given the world a lead in attaining these goals, and through that achievement, paving the way for the unity and equality of mankind. The first example that it has set for the world is that it has begun to narrow the gulf between the rich and poor nations. The Commonwealth was derived from the British Empire, and as a result is made up of developed and developing nations. At the birth of the Commonwealth, naturally Britain was dominant, with the other developed nations playing more important roles than the less developed territories. Today, however, within the organisation itself, the 'white Commonwealth' no longer dominates the Third World countries. As a result, the Commonwealth helps give the small and medium sized countries a more effective voice in world affairs, and at the same time attempts to eradicate the colonial-based white superiority. It is also worthy of note that the members of the Commonwealth represent nearly every major race in the world—a certainly effective example of fellowship and brotherhood which will hopefully soon be emulated by other alliances. The Commonwealth, therefore, cannot be accused of not practising what it preaches.

Apart from the example it sets within its community, it was reported in the June 6, 1972 edition of The Jamaica Gleaner that the value of the Commonwealth as a promoter of inter-racial harmony is appreciated by countries outside of it. This is not to say that the members of the Commonwealth are totally free from prejudices—admittedly there are certain tensions within the Commonwealth family. However, what it does in its favour is the action it takes as a unified body to initiate the brotherhood of man irrespective of race, creed or colour.

The most important and significant step it took in this direction was the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth and its continued condemnation of that state's apartheid system. Furthermore
it imposed sanctions on the country; thereby discouraging international relations; and urged the international community to apply an arms embargo on the state - an especially strict sanction. Some countries maintained links with South Africa, despite this; notably Britain and New Zealand - yet the Commonwealth agreed that the South African system of apartheid was a threat to international peace, and they saw the struggle for freedom as their own struggle as well.

When Jiri Amin was accused of organizing mass terror in Uganda, the Commonwealth openly condemned him and broke off diplomatic relations with the country in 1976. The Commonwealth had pledged support to liberation movements in South Africa, so that when Ian Smith's illegal regime came to power in Rhodesia, they immediately set to work. In 1980 they helped to end illegality and the repression of blacks through democratic elections thereby creating the free state of Zimbabwe. Economic assistance was also provided to many African nations, notably Mozambique and Namibia. The fact that all territories except Kenya and Rhodesia gained independence without war is proof enough of the adherence of the Commonwealth to its goals. British relations with black Africa are better than they were fifteen years ago, which is another step towards progress.

Another important contribution which the Commonwealth has made to the cause of human welfare is that of education. Sound education is the root of all advancement - be it social or technological - for it is from here that ideas or doctrines spread. The Commonwealth has successfully penetrated every level of education. At university level, the Association of Commonwealth Universities is an aid to students of its member states, as they are given certain privileges, such as the Commonwealth Scholarship plan. The University of the West Indies was built largely through the efforts of the Commonwealth nations, and the system is continually being revised in the search for improvement. At the secondary school level, the most notable effort is the encouragement of competitions such as this one, which promotes the idea of the organi
and all that it stands for. There is also a special programme for assisting the Education of Rhodesian Africans, and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation greatly benefits the newer developed territories.
A most important achievement is that educated leaders are able to work together in the Commonwealth regardless of race.

Other various associations within the Commonwealth promote unity, though practical business links— for example, the Commonwealth Finance Minis
Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, Commonwealth Finance Minis
Assistance to Commonwealth Universities, and most importantly the Commonwealth Heads of Government. Unlike its counterpart in the United Nations, this last-mentioned group encourages equality of its member states through its informality. It brings the heads of government together regularly - again unlike the UN - and invites differing governments and developed and developing nations under extremely cordial surroundings. The
Commonwealth, notably, is a bridge between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and non-alignment - a significant position in influencing acceptance of different beliefs. One topic which its other organisations have discussed is the equality of women - an issue which was raised in the 1976 Commonwealth conference.

Despite all the progress it has made, there have been notable calls which have caused the Commonwealth considerable delay in the progress towards its goals. According to a remand made by Forbes Burnham, Prime Minister of Guyana, in 1978; he stated that in the Commonwealth there exists "a dialogue between the deaf", pledges and papere work, but not enough evidence that man has the basic human necessities. One varia
issue there indeed seems to be "a dialogue between the deaf."

With reference to the South Africa question there have been numerous controversies. When the sanctions were first imposed on South Africa, Britain was still selling arms to her. Even up to today, Britain has not completely reversed the way with South Africa. In 1977, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Robert Muldoon, suspended his athletes from competing in South Africa, but did not forbid them. The Commonwealth had decided
In leave the decision up to each individual country how to discourage their athletes, with the result that there was no great success. New Zealand, like Britain, still has certain links with South Africa, which they apparently refuse to sever. The main reason is that the trade relations they have with South Africa are beneficial to them, and they do not wish to sacrifice them to promote the equality of races. The West Indian Cricketers who went on tour to South Africa were also another problem. All of these actions effectively weakened the Commonwealth because due to the internal thickening, it could not present a united front.

The belief which the Commonwealth has always held on to firmly has weakened as well. Religious intolerance in India, who, claims to a Hindu state, has triggered off many negative reactions among the other religious communities in India - notably the violent clashes between the Sikhs and the Hindus. There are similar situations in Pakistan, who wish a Muslim state, and Sri Lanka, where the Buddhists oppose the Tamils. Such intolerance is against the Commonwealth principle of equal race, creed, and colour. The strong bond of the Westminster-styled parliamentary system once common to all member states collapsed in Pakistan, Grenada, India, and Tanzania, with the loss of parliamentary democracy. The problem is especially serious in various African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, where there have been armed takeovers. James Callaghan, then Prime Minister of Britain, remarked in 1977, "more and more Africans "see the gun as the only means of winning freedom."

The restriction Britain has imposed concerning emigration has also caused problems. With the new policy that allows citizenship to persons whose parent or grandparents were British is in effect, a means of trying to preserve the old colonial system, so immigration into Britain of people from Third World countries is mainly occurred in the generation of their parents or grandparents were not British, so they are denied citizenship. The problem is especially acute with several nations of Ugandan resident in Britain - they have been expelled from Uganda, and under the new laws, are now forced to leave Britain.

One comment which shows the negative affect such controversy within
the Commonwealth can endure, was that made by Professor Max Beloff in the Trinidad Guardian of August 23rd, 1970. "It can be argued that the existence of the Commonwealth is an obstacle to our declared policy of giving complete equality in the fullest sense... irrespective of colour or origin."

In the June 17th, 1977 edition of the Jamaica Gleaner, Shridath Ramphal, Secretary General of the Commonwealth stated: "The Commonwealth has made a contribution to progress [in South Africa and world economic relations]. But we are still far from success in either. This statement can be applied to the Commonwealth's contribution to the brotherhood of man and to the cause of human welfare - a great contribution has indeed been made, but "we are still far from success in either."

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