

RC 81

ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY 4TH PRIZE
ESSAY COMPETITION

DENISE LIMBY

CLASS: A



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BREAM BAY COLLEGE

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PRIVATE BAG,
RUAKAKA,
NORTHLAND,
NEW-ZEALAND.

CERTIFIED BY:

R. W. C. G. L.

BREAM BAY COLLEGE

ENGLISH DEPT

A — —
Liberate; thought prov.
Commonwealth aspects not
emphasised though it has an
original approach & is evenly
written.

Commonwealth essay

- ② Modern communications make us more aware of each other, of our similarities, our differences, and our common interests. What effect, if any, does this have on the Commonwealth?

When we travel by bus, there is often nothing better to do than to examine the other human creatures, sitting and standing, all about us.

It is perhaps interesting to note that the plump, red faced woman in front of us is starting on her third sticky doughnut while reading a diet book. Or we realise the elderly waistcoated gentleman opposite can roll and light a cigarette expertly, using only one hand. We are forced, through mutual need, into close quarters with these people. In such a confined space it is almost impossible for us not to notice their existence.

When we get off at our stop, however, how long do we remember the harassed mother and her energetic brood? Or the teenage girl, her long lank hair not quite hiding the tears in her eyes?

Perhaps in the same way, the modern communication advances - the throbbing, relentless media message, force us to realise the existence of foreign peoples and lifestyles. As we go about our housework, drive in the car, or relax on the beach, the radio is a constant background of news and information. In our

homes, the flickering phosphorescent screen, and urgent babble of the television, are ever present. A vast army of computers stand sentinel the world over, providing a network of communication. They transfer information from one part of the world to another at an awesome speed.

A great wealth of knowledge on every country, that would take mountains of books to fill, is all stored on tiny microchips. This information, both trivial and crucial, is all at our fingertips.

Communication links are the arteries of our planet, pumping information and ideas, its life blood, to every part of the globe. Each day, the Westerner comes face to television screen with that many headed, multi-voiced creature that is the outside world. We may then ask: What is the effect that communication has on the individual's relationship with his world?

Communications technology works like an incredible shrinking machine. As the rapidity of communications increases, distance and time become looser and looser. Satellite pictures are relayed instantly all over the world, and telex machines and computers click madly at the same breathtaking pace.

Consider that an English holiday maker can travel in comfort from England to Australia, in the same time that it took a prosperous merchant of the Shakespearean era to traverse the distance from a town at the top of England, to another settlement on the Southern coast (give or take a few recreational stops at ale houses along the way).

This radical alteration of space and time has a profound psychological effect.

If produces the idea of a "global village" as Dr Norbert Weiner (the man who gave us cybernetics) once said; "It is possible to maintain that communication has made the World State inevitable."

In particular we may become a much closer knit Commonwealth than ever before. There is a specific reason why Commonwealth countries should initiate this new unity. Communications depend greatly upon language, and the English language is something that the vast majority of Commonwealth members share. Perhaps not all of us have English as our native tongue but most of us at least learn it as a second language. The fact that a Commonwealth Essay, written in English is offered as a challenge to all Commonwealth students, is testament to this.

In the past many of us may have been slightly xenophobic. Introverted souls, we shunned the far away cultures and places that seemed so dangerously different. We could hide from the world - there were "dragons" out there. The sorrows, problems and disasters of these countries were the most fearful of these firebreathing dragons.

Foreign countries had as much meaning to us as faded pictures in a story book. Somewhere away from our own cosy little haven we supposed they did exist, but they were only significant to the free souls and adventurous spirits who actually travelled there.

Now, however, the world infiltrates our lives with a daily barrage of images and words, brought to us by the media. Now, the outside world is brought into our

living rooms. We know of the widespread famines in Third World countries. We can list the diseases that Pacific Island children suffer from. We give seminars in History class on the metamorphosis of the British Empire into the independent but united countries of the Commonwealth.

The citizens of today are proud parents of the communications technology that brings us in close contact with other countries in the Commonwealth. This, however, does not mean that these "scientific marvels" have any effect on our interactions with these countries. It does not mean our attitudes are altered. Neither is it a foregone conclusion that knowledge means change.

Whether or not change occurs depends on the conscious choice of the individual. We can only hope that for the affluent Westerner (of one Commonwealth country) the pleading large eyed child (of another Commonwealth nation) will be too real to ignore.

This then, is the supreme power of media communications - the power to influence and persuade. Some of us see this power solely as a method of money making - to sell Whiter-Washing Soap powder, Run-Resistant pantyhose or Finer-Blended coffee. Others, concerned with people not products, realise other uses. It can persuade us that while certain differences are a barrier to unity, we do as members of the Commonwealth indeed share a "Common wealth". Our similarities prevent the ideals of unity and peace from being lost causes. The main difference between the peoples of

the Commonwealth (indeed of the world) is not religion, colour or language. It is not the staple diet or the major exports. The main difference is between rich and poor.

Communications also point out our similarities. The one major similarity between different members of the Commonwealth is that we are all people. And the irritatingly simple truism is that as members of the human race, we should endeavour to help each other. Modern communications mean we can no longer cry in self-righteous protest: "But we didn't know!" (Just as people claimed ignorance of the genocide of six million Jews, during World War II)

Modern communications can mean propaganda - like the sort employed by Hitler - but it can also mean mass education. Politicians are no longer demigods who have the sole say in World affairs. Thankfully so, for absolute power invariably corrupts. When information is available to everyone and when the means of relaying information is available to everyone, propaganda can no longer be used to serve the interests of a few. Would dictators such as Mussolini, Stalin and Hitler have enjoyed supreme power if they had not exercised tight control over the press and the radio?

The nature of modern communication is such that complete control by one party, over the views of the entire population, is practically impossible. Communication today is so widespread, so immediate and so rapid, that many different views are certain to be aired. The facts of a situation are also readily available, thanks to the efficiency

of communications technology. This means that, at least, the population of a country is not subject to the whims of a selfish individual, under whom international relations could severely suffer. It also means that truths, not lies, are more likely to prevail, and the truth, though it might hurt, is likely to be more beneficial to more people.

The phenomena of "double talk", "officialese" and "red tape" (all in themselves, examples of jargon) are institutions as unshakeable as Santa Claus. The least we can hope for is more objective and complete communication. This prevents the country's leaders from being able to instil a narrow minded fear or hatred of other countries in our minds.

As the avenues of communication open up, it is inevitable that both sides of the story will be heard. The bigotry of phrases such as "they deserve all they get", "it's their own fault for having so many children" or "we should look after our own kind - let them worry about themselves" will hopefully be realized for what they are: - convenient excuses for avoiding the problems.

Once we have no more excuses to offer, perhaps we will realize we need to help in solving the problems. Words are not enough - volunteers are needed. We need these "dragonslayers", people who are prepared to go out and work for a greater unity and understanding in the Commonwealth.

Because of increasingly firm links of communication between Commonwealth countries, the more each component country is able to offer the people of another. We can offer much needed aid in education ^{and} ~~medicine~~.

We can share technological developments and scientific breakthroughs, as well as the experience of different lifestyles, rich in culture and enriching to one's education. The principle is that sharing resources will mean greater unity. It can be likened to a track running through dense bush, which connects two homesteads; the more often the track is crossed, the more "well worn" it becomes, and consequently, the easier it is to traverse.

Since the young people of the Commonwealth will be the leaders of tomorrow, it is to them that this communication has greatest relevance.

In modern times the young people's counter-revolution has provided us with the "hippy" philosophy, complete with bangles and beads. This philosophy carried the message "Tune in and drop out" (translated: don't worry about what's going on around you, just settle in your own little niche.) "All you need is love" was the advice offered by the Beatles. What we needed then and what we need now is something more than love. Love can only mean change if it is accompanied by hard work.

Communications, providing today's youth with a hard hitting view of the world around them, may make the young person think again before he "tunes in" and "drops out." If he does not want simply to ignore the world, he may decide to help those overseas. The Commonwealth, as an organisation, provides many opportunities for hard work on behalf of others. Films, magazines and television documentaries provide knowledge of schemes for just this purpose.

The young person of one commonwealth

country may win a Commonwealth scholarship to another, or take part in Voluntary Services overseas. The young Asian student works side by side with Australian students in a university laboratory. The young British doctor helps dispatch medical aid to the people of a Zambian village. Such interaction means a great wealth of knowledge shared. More knowledge than could ever be gained from the bureaucratic tanglings of government machinery. A greater understanding is reached through these schemes than is reached at many a Heads of Government conference.

Understanding, interaction and sharing; the possibility of such ideals being realised is the first step towards unity and peace. The Commonwealth is perhaps best suited, through common heritage, to achieve these goals.

Communications technology of modern times links the countries of the Commonwealth, bringing them closer together in the "global village" or "World state" described by Dr Wiener. Who knows but that communications could radically change the way we think. In the future the numbers we are concerned with may be the numbers of foreign students our universities can educate, and not the numbers on our "winning" lottery ticket. The colours we recognise in friendly acceptance may not be just those of our own flag or those of our own skin colour but instead all those colours that make up the Commonwealth, and maybe even the world. The title we give to people of other nations may not be "foreigners" or "strangers" but fellow members of the Commonwealth.

Bibliography

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