

Second Prize
~~Third Prize~~

Royal Empire Society Essay Competition, 1951.

Class A.

"Which, in your opinion, are the three main problems facing the British Empire today, and how do you think they may best be solved?"

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It is probable that every time the man-in-the-street reads his newspaper, whether "The Times", "The Daily Mirror", or "The Oamaru Mail" he sees some news about the British Commonwealth of Nations. I find that the problems of Migration, Defence, and the Future Unity of the Commonwealth are the most important that appear. All these subjects, which have been in the news since the founding of the Empire, are problems in themselves, and yet they are all inter-dependent; for migration is certainly one of the first steps in defence, and without a strong defence the Commonwealth is sure to collapse. Accordingly I shall discuss the problems with that relationship in mind.

Present-day Great Britain finds herself in the unique position that she is the most densely populated country in the British Commonwealth of Nations and yet is the weak link in that world-wide world power. Two recent world wars have shown us that a submarine blockade is possible and it is hard to imagine that in the event of a third world war a blockade against Great Britain, with the aid of atomic weapons, would fail. Thus the population might be starved into submission and with the fall of England the under-populated Dominions could not last long.

This threat, however, would not exist if the population were about 30 millions as that is the number of people for whom the essential food could be produced in Great Britain. A population of this size would also be ideal in normal peace-time conditions

as the same volume of industrial exports is assured, because reconstruction in England would not be necessary, while the food problem could adequately met with the barest of overseas imports.

Thus we have two good reasons for emigration to the Dominions; but there is yet another, - that of the wartime distribution of industry. If ~~the~~ the majority of factories for war materials were located in Great Britain, as they are now, the rest of the Commonwealth could be easily crushed by an aggressor if this source of supply were destroyed by atomic warfare. On the other hand if each of the Dominions was to have its own supply of war materials the task facing an aggressor would be much greater and almost impossible. In peacetime, the Dominions would have their own industry and would be able to use their own raw materials. Only in this way could they grow into full nationhood and together form a ruling world power.

In the British Commonwealth of Nations there are five countries suitable for migration, - Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia. All these countries have moderately temperate climates, vast resources, small population, and are willing to accept immigrants. On the other hand, a recent public opinion poll taken in England showed that every third person was willing to emigrate. Thus we can safely say that 10 millions would go if the opportunity were given them.

Such a suggestion for planned migration has arrived in the form of a publication, issued by the Migration Council in London, called "Operation Commonwealth". It recognizes the fact that England must not be stripped of all her trained workers, but the migration must

be in the form of a whole community being transferred to one of the Dominions. They use as an example a Yorkshire woollen town with a population of about 20,000. The industry of this town is dependent on wool from Australia or New Zealand so that if it were shifted to one of those countries it would have no ill-effect on Great Britain. The plan is for the whole community to be transferred to the Dominion, the people bringing with them their occupations, whether they be woollen worker or cinema usher. On the new location in New Zealand a new planned town would be built by an advance party of tradesmen and technicians from Yorkshire, assisted by New Zealanders. When this town was ready the main body of immigrants could arrive and take over immediately. The individuals would have the advantage that they would have familiar faces around them in a brand new town, and the Dominion would have acquired a whole new community.

This scheme can be used in the establishment of all types of industry but as is the way with all new schemes it will be queried. One of the queries which will be made is whether there will be enough shipping available to make the shift possible. A few years ago shipping was made available to transport an army and its equipment to the Middle East, so it would be very easy to obtain shipping for this scheme. Another objection would be that the remaining population of Great Britain would have to face an increased National Debt. This is quite true but Australia has offered to pay the share of all the immigrants whom she receives and the other Dominions would probably do likewise.

Thus we have a plan of migration within the Commonwealth. Although a need for this has been apparent for some years, nothing has been done about it. Who is going to take the lead in this move to make the Commonwealth powerful? Let us pray it is taken soon.

Now that we have studied the problem of migration it is easy to see that the strongest defence of the Commonwealth can only be maintained if the population is distributed evenly, but as this ~~distribution~~ distribution cannot be effected for some time, it is necessary to examine the problem of defence with regard to the present day Commonwealth.

Colonial, Imperial, and now Commonwealth defence has been subject to political discussion for nearly 100 years. Although the nature of this defence has altered greatly in that time, the geographical aspect with ^{regard} to the strategic bases and countries within the Commonwealth has remained the same. In 1887, when the first Imperial Conference was held, Great Britain was the undisputed mistress of the seas and none dared cross her path. Times have changed, however, and the important weapons of today are the aeroplane, the submarine, and the atomic bomb. In 50 years scientific knowledge has altered the whole technique of war and now it is brought to all people, whether they are in the front line or the home towns of the servicemen.

What has not changed is the fact that the United Kingdom is still the bulwark of our defence, for here is the greatest population

and naturally the greatest war effort. In 1938, speaking in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister of England, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, said that their defence policy was in three parts; firstly, the defence of the United Kingdom, secondly, the defence of the Commonwealth, and thirdly, co-operation in the defence of her allies. This policy and priority remains the same today, but the Commonwealth countries must not depend upon Great Britain entirely, but must do their utmost in their own defence as previous experience has shown that in global conflict crises can develop overnight.

The defence systems of the Commonwealth will be known as regional systems. That is, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States will be jointly concerned in the South Pacific area; the United Kingdom, the U.S.A., and Canada will be concerned in the North Pacific and North Atlantic areas. In the Indian Ocean many Commonwealth countries will be interested and here it must be realized that Pakistan and India may have differing opinions on some aspects of foreign policy which might disrupt some scheme. But whatever these views are it would be best if the two countries were to assume normal defence precautions as soon as possible. The Mediterranean is another region of defence, although it will probably lose this importance in the coming air age. At present it is maintained by the United Kingdom, the United States, and France. From a study of these systems it will be seen that in all, the Commonwealth defence is composed not only of mutual alliances between the Commonwealth countries, but also with the United States, and this alliance must always be maintained as it is one of the main supports of our

defence plans.

Having glanced at the political situation we will turn to the manner of defence. At present ships are the carriers of the world's trade and thus our interest will be mainly on the ability of the Commonwealth countries to keep the five main ocean routes open. To achieve this object controlling bases will be necessary, and the Commonwealth is fortunate in possessing such bases on all the routes. These bases are also available to aircraft which are becoming as an essential an element as ships. Many of the bases in this world-wide series do not need to depend upon Great Britain for ships, planes, or personnel, as the Dominions all have navies or naval divisions of their own which can serve adequately at these bases. In the past the Commonwealth countries have been very generous with their assistance, which shows no signs of abating. The Dominions are already increasing their air strength in anticipation of an early conflict, and are setting up training schemes uniform with those of Great Britain. We can also be assured that this Commonwealth co-operation in defence will be even greater in the future and will take place alongside greater international co-operation.

It seems, then, that the ideal system of collective security, for which the League of Nations strove, and which the Dominions supported so earnestly, will have to be abandoned for the present, and systems of regional defence set up, but no matter what courses are taken in the future it is fairly probable that the Commonwealth will act in concert with the U.S.A. and other countries, where their interests are mutual, to obtain world peace and security.

The last problem that I will deal with is not in the true sense a problem facing the Commonwealth, which needs a solution, but more of a query --- "What will happen to the Commonwealth in the years to come ? Will it fall to pieces or will the members come closer together in a grand political, financial, and economic alliance ?"

The view that the Commonwealth is disintegrating has been held by many people at some time or other, but the bulk of the statements to that effect have been made after some country within the Commonwealth has achieved its independence. These critics totally misconceive the idea of the British Empire, which, unlike the Roman or German Empires, is not a number of dominated countries, but a systems of nations and a community of states, which is greater than any Empire of conquest.


The British Empire of today is a dynamic system with all its members proceeding along different routes and at different speeds towards the ultimate goal of self-government. This ideal of British policy is continually at work and like John Brown's soul it still goes marching on. Naturally then, only those who make the fundamental mistake and think that Great Britain maintains the Commonwealth by force believe that it is collapsing when a member achieves self-government.

The last 40 years have shown us that as the Dominions grow in international status their adhesion to the Commonwealth strengthens. The two world wars, when the Dominions immediately came to the aid of the Mother country, was the best example of this cohesion. After

the Second World War, the enlarged world status of the Dominions has encouraged them to take a more active part in international politics and to find out for themselves how they may best improve their trade and defence.

In the latter respect the Pacific Dominions have turned to that great Pacific power, the U.S.A. for strength in alliance. For trade, however, they have all turned to each other and formed a bond which the coming years will strengthen, as more colonies approaching nationhood and desiring economic and even political ties, turn towards their elder sisters in the Commonwealth.

It appears, then, that the British Commonwealth of Nations will carry on into the future as a unified body. The strength of this unification depends on the will of the Dominions to remain united. With schemes of migration and defence before them, which will improve their industrial resources and security, it seems that the gift of the British Empire to the Future is likely to be rather of the Empire-Commonwealth itself, as a pattern and nucleus of a much wider organisation yet to be, and in the words of a previous United Kingdom High Commissioner to New Zealand, Sir Patrick Duff, when he spoke in Invercargill, New Zealand, "It may well be that the island from which the world learned the art of freedom will yet teach the art of Unity."



List of books consulted.

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THE BRITISH FAMILY OF NATIONS,

by JOHN COATMAN.

PEOPLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH; A CASE FOR MIGRATION

A SPEECH BY SIR PATRICK DUFF MADE IN INVERCARGILL,
NEW ZEALAND, IN 1948.