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"That the Commonwealth is more likely to become
stronger and more united by the end of this
century."

The Commonwealth has often been likened to one large family of Great Britain and her 'daughters', the Colonies. However, even the most affectionate of children will eventually grow up and seek adult life; accordingly, the past forty years have seen great changes in the Commonwealth as the daughters ^{have} experienced a fiery adolescence. Is the Commonwealth likely to become stronger and more united by the end of the century? As I hope to prove, this is not likely to happen.

Strength, in real terms, concerns not only military muscle, but also political influence in the international sphere, and population and wealth of a country. Unity, meaning literally 'oneness', is acting together: participation in trade and defence, similar political policies and aims. I believe that, through a lack of true unity, the Commonwealth will not gain in strength.

The gradual dissolution of the Commonwealth is partly due to changing alliances in defence agreements. For, even when the great distance between Britain and the other countries of the Commonwealth is not taken into consideration, the Mother country is no longer a military superpower: the United States armed forces alone total more than the combined forces of the Commonwealth. Many nations continue to build up their arms supplies, especially nuclear armament, while virtually all Commonwealth countries are either too poor to establish a large, modern defence, or are reluctant to do so. As a result, many members have turned away from the Commonwealth into defence agreements such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and ANZUS. Clearly, like me, they have little confidence in the future of the Commonwealth armed forces.

A typical example of this move away from the Commonwealth is evident in New Zealand's changing defence policy.

Before World War Two, New Zealand was fully dependent on Britain and the Commonwealth. After the war, it became obvious that it was America which was responsible for the defeat of the Japanese in the Pacific, while Britain was

showing less interest in the area. In 1951, New Zealand formalised her reliance on America in ANZUS, a pact from which, significantly, Britain was totally excluded. New Zealand, independent of Britain, sent troops to Vietnam in aid of the Americans - ANZUS is now generally regarded as our most important defence agreement.

As a consequence, if Britain and America disagree over a defence matter, certain Commonwealth countries are caught between the two. This happened over the 1956 invasion of Egypt by Britain and France. Canada and India, taking the US point of view, opposed the move; Canada was later to vote against Britain in the United Nations over the affair. Thus it is shown that such divided alliances tend to weaken, not strengthen, the Commonwealth.

Population is an indication of strength, and indeed, it is true that the Commonwealth is growing. However, it is erroneous to believe that its strength will increase comparably. The Republic of the Maldives, member number forty-seven, is typical of the most recent additions. A tiny cluster of atolls in the Indian Ocean, it has a total population of only 143,000¹; this country can add little to the military and economic strength of the Commonwealth. In fact, the inclusion of these tiny states may prove to tax Commonwealth resources: being 'great temptations to predators²', they need, on occasion, to be defended. An example is the defence of the Falkland Islands; each day of the conflict was costing Britain \$4.5 million³.

Average per capita earnings of several Commonwealth countries (in Amount per year) (In U.S. dollars, 1975 statistics.) ⁴	
Malawi	- 66
Tanzania	- 70
Gambia	- 100
Canada	- 4 700

Another ball and chain on the Commonwealth is the fact that most of the new members are poor; as seen on the chart, some are amongst the poorest

¹ 1978 statistics from 1981/2 Official Yearbook.

² Commonwealth Magazine Aug. 1982.

³ Time Magazine May 24 1982.

⁴ The Commonwealth P.B. Horn's 1975 p 39.

in the world. The immense poverty of these countries is such that they are unlikely ever to recover; they will continue to sap the strength from Britain, herself 'suffering from an attack of anaemia'. As I have shown in the last three paragraphs, the very nature of the composition of the Commonwealth belies that it will increase in strength.

The strength of a community also concerns the extent of influence in the world, or political power. Here again, the Commonwealth is stumbling in the wake of the superpowers. This is due to political diversity caused by two important factors.

Firstly, the 'new' Commonwealth is split into two factions: the 'old', affluent countries such as Australia and Canada; and the 'new' members, chiefly of Africa and Asia, which tend to be poor but strongly nationalistic. On the simple basis that ^{people} who live differently think differently, one could assume that total unity in the Commonwealth is a thing of the past.

Secondly, many regard membership of the Commonwealth as 'independence plus' - they may enjoy the benefits of multilateral aid schemes while having the freedom to follow their own, sometimes diversive, policies. This is a convenient arrangement for the separate nations, but is detrimental to the Commonwealth as a whole. For example India, independent since 1947, which, with a population of approximately 547 million, constitutes 63%³ of the total population of the Commonwealth. The benefits of such a large population, with all the political impact behind it, ^{are} lost to the Commonwealth, because on many issues, India follows her diversive policy of non-alignment.

Another aspect of unity involves trade and monetary exchange. The old Empire truly was a unit in this respect: in trade, 'imperial preference' secured trade between Britain and the Dominions; in finance, all members banked through

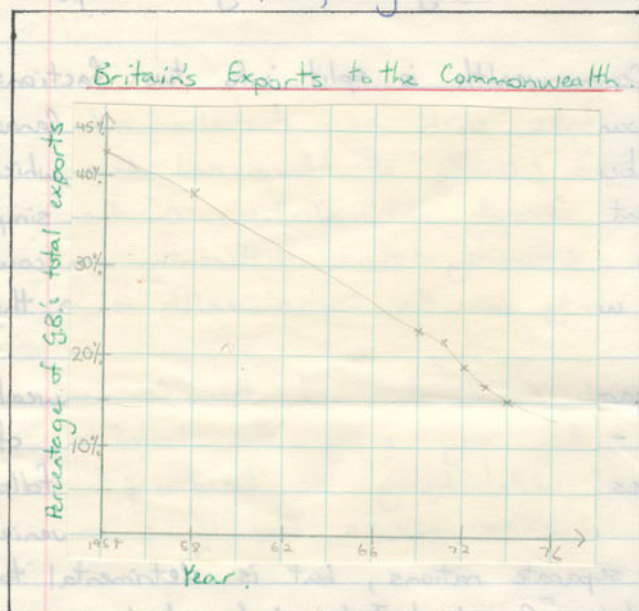
1 B. Thomas. Migration and Economic Growth 1954 p 218.

2 Patrick Kestley. The Guardian, Aug. 11 1973

3 Commonwealth Magazine Aug. 1982.

London. Now, in comparison, members of the Commonwealth take advantage of more liberal international trade conditions to import and export anywhere they wish. For example, the U.S. is New Zealand's second largest trade partner behind Australia; New Zealand trades extensively with non-Commonwealth countries such as China and the U.S.S.R. And, with the value of the pound plummeting in Britain, major financial centres such as New York and Tokyo offer more lucrative prospects than London.

Britain's Exports to the Commonwealth



Britain, very much the heart of the Commonwealth, herself made a very disruptive move when she joined the E.E.C. (European Economic Community) in 1972. So, Britain's exports to the Commonwealth have steadily dropped from 42.5% in 1955, to 15% in 1974. Britain is 'double-booked' between Europe and the Commonwealth; inevitably, she must opt for the geographically closer, more secure market of the E.E.C.

A similar sign of disunity in the Commonwealth is seen in the immigration conditions. Selective

immigration policies are practised by all members, purely in the interests of preserving their own economies and controlling population trends to their own advantage. Unity may not be fostered while such 'every man for himself' attitudes prevail.

These symptoms of disunity cannot be checked while the present loose alliances persist in the Commonwealth. There is no official constitution; legal links are ... 'reduced to a wisp of gossamer... they are rules of convention, not strict law - a shadowy framework of a shifting structure¹ members are expected - but not committed - to contribute. A rugby team is

¹ Prof. De Smith, quoted in Colonies into Commonwealth by W.O. McIntyre 1966

weakened when a player fails to turn up at ~~game~~ matches or doesn't bother to play seriously; so it is with the Commonwealth. And with no constitution, there is no means of enforcing members to pursue policies of benefit to the Commonwealth as a whole.

These examples have shown that there is an unwillingness and lack of commitment on the part of member nations to share in the Commonwealth and together to bring it ^{back} to a position of strength and influence in the world. The vicious cycle continues: lack of strength through lack of unity; lack of unity through lack of enforcing power.

Finally, racialism and the reaction to it will be a divisive factor in the future. South Africa has been a particular bogeyman since it left, in disgrace, from the Commonwealth in 1961. Most members, especially of Africa, shun South Africa because of 'apartheid'; other Commonwealth countries, notably New Zealand, persist in maintaining sporting contacts there. The resultant friction was seen plainly at the hostile Heads of Government meeting held in October 1981. Bitter feeling runs deep; even the Commonwealth Games, ironically called the 'friendly games', have been boycotted, blackballed, and almost abandoned. Unity in the Commonwealth will not increase while South Africa's shadow follows us around.

There have been attempts made, largely by Britain, to reverse the trends that I have spoken of. Benefits, aid plans, and technological and administrative facilities have been stepped up and improved upon. But these are superficial remedies; Britain is like the hapless doctor who puts a band-aid on a stomach ache. The ailing Commonwealth is being belittled by international competition in defence, administration, and finance; there is diversity in political policy-making and international alliances. The Commonwealth is flimsily linked with a series of dubious conventions; there is disharmony even in the once innocent arena of sport.

I conclude that the Commonwealth is not likely to become stronger and more united by the end of this century. It is too late: Mother's little helpers have grown up, made new

¹ The official South African policy which denies certain racial groups the right to vote; a policy of separate development of races.

to friends, experimented with their own plans. The once close-knit family will not be brought back together again.

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