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INTRODUCTION

The first step in writing an essay of this kind must, of necessity, consist in arriving at a comprehensive definition of the operative terms. Only when the true nature and purpose of the Commonwealth have been agreed upon, and only when satisfactory criteria of both a "break-up" and a "growing-up" have been established is it possible to examine the evidence and reach a justifiable conclusion. The wealth of relevant information then falls conveniently under four main headings; in each of the sections I propose to investigate the possibilities of a "break-up" and a "growing-up" occurring. Broadly speaking it is true to say that certain problems exist; to fail to overcome the most vital of these problems would involve the disintegration of the Commonwealth, whereas their satisfactory solution would constitute important steps towards maturity:-

Section Headings with main problems:

1) Importance of Britain's leadership - its present unsatisfactory nature; effects on Commonwealth of British relations with Europe and U.S.A.

2) Foreign Policy and Military co-operation: difficulty of co-ordination to meet external threats; India's neutrality and dislike of South Africa; dangerous position between India and Pakistan; Suez and after.

3) The Economic Position: Weakness of Sterling on the World Money Market; unsatisfactory state of Commonwealth Trade tariffs; difficulty of saving without cutting vital development loans; development of the Colombo plan.

4) The accession to Dominion Status and responsible Government of native colonies: Problems to be overcome; their future as members in the Commonwealth; the adaptation of Western liberal principles to native customs and institutions. This is the most important problem, by the solution of which colonialism stands or falls.

The Commonwealth is not breaking up, but growing up - Discuss.

The term "The British Commonwealth" first appeared in the nineteen twenties, when such expressions as 'Empire' and 'Imperialism' were already becoming meaningless in the hands of propagandists. It originally referred only to those countries which had obtained responsible self-government within the old Empire, but has since by common consent, come to include Crown Colonies, Dependencies and Trust Territories; and it is as such that I intend to consider it for the purposes of this essay. Indeed, it is this quality of complete informality, and absence of set rules, definitions and constitutions that is the most important and attractive aspect of Commonwealth relations. With the exception of Crown Colonies, all members may secede whenever they wish as none owes written constitutional allegiance to Britain; neither do member countries owe Britain any military obligations and none is bound to us by alliance. However, the fact that the entire Commonwealth, with the notable exception of Southern Ireland, came valiantly to Britain's aid in 1939 and gave invaluable support throughout the War, testifies to the great strength of the seemingly tenuous bonds which hold its members together; I refer here to the heritage of democracy, rule of Law and veneration of individual freedom bestowed by Britain on her erstwhile colonies, countries which now look to her for a lead and an example in these vital spheres of human activity. In 1833, Macaulay said "There is an Empire exempt from all natural causes of decay, the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws" - this applies no less to-day than it did then, but its scope must now be revised, as since then, the distinction between colonies-by-settlement and colonies-by-acquisition has arisen. Under the former heading comes Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and to a lesser extent South Africa, areas peopled almost exclusively (not South Africa) by colonists steeped in British, European traditions, religion and political principles. For these countries

to evolve a satisfactory system of government on democratic lines and later to achieve complete self-government put little strain on the patience of the colonists or on the ingenuity of the Constitutional lawyers; again South Africa provides the exception. These new nations recognised the importance of their heritage, and their relations with Britain are at present most harmonious. However the Second World War unleashed a wave of militant nationalism in Africa and even more so in Asia, on the crest of which vast native populations were swept to the responsible government and autonomy which they so ardently desired. Of these, Pakistan & India elected to remain within the Commonwealth, of which they now represent three quarters of the total population, and rather more than that of illiteracy, poverty, disease and starvation. In these countries, as in Ceylon, Ghana and Malaya, the people are not steeped in European civilisation, indeed, many know little about it and care less, and they share no common heritage with Britain and Europe. Their allegiance to the Commonwealth depends largely on the goodwill and ability of the 'Europeanised' minority, which reflects directly the extent of the success of British Colonial rule. Thus the Commonwealth is neither a military alliance nor a confederation of states, but an ideal of nations co-operating with one another on an equal footing and on the basis of justice, freedom and mutual interests. But the tremendous change that has taken place since the War, has necessitated a reappraisal of the nature and purpose of the Commonwealth. In fact a new Commonwealth has been born. So it follows, that the validity of old ideals, attitudes and policies must now be reassessed, with respect to the new problems which have arisen. The co-operation inside the old Commonwealth was so complete in the period 1939-1945, for one to be able to say that ~~one~~ ~~efforts~~ little remains to be achieved now, outside the realm of trade. All our efforts should be centred on the progress to maturity of India and Pakistan and the other similar countries, using the unity of the old Commonwealth as foundation for this; and not as a yardstick by which to measure failings and weaknesses of the new Commonwealth.

Old hard-won ideals must not be sacrificed, but neither should they be rigidly applied to the achievements of the native countries of the Commonwealth - they must be adapted and sights must be temporarily lowered to fit their capabilities. If this is achieved the Commonwealth can truly be said to have grown up. On the other hand, should India, Malaya and Ceylon renounce the traditions imposed upon them, even if the old Dominions remained loyal, the ideal of the Commonwealth would be broken. Thus the nature of a break-up of the Commonwealth would be that of having failed, and failing to respond to a series of new challenges. At present, one can do little more than assess the success with which post-war policies and attitudes are likely to meet.

By far the most important country in the Commonwealth is Britain. Largely in these islands do modern concepts of democracy, rule of law and tolerance have their origins, and it is these things, together with the English Language and culture which Britain in the last three centuries has spread to the distant corners of the Earth. To-day it is this country alone which has the power, as head of the Commonwealth to grant self-government to her colonies. In the past, British superiority in the Empire was largely an armed superiority, now it is, or should be, a moral superiority within a Commonwealth of Nations co-operating for mutual interest on the basis of mutually accepted ideals. Leadership of this kind is vastly more difficult to maintain and incapable of definition, but its success becomes immediately apparent in the reaction of other countries to the policies of their leader; and a Commonwealth without Britain as its leader is a contradiction in terms.

"But you forget", the fervent royalist will protest, "you forget the importance of the Crown as a symbol of unity in the Commonwealth!" I hasten to reassure him that I have not forgotten it, but rather that I am sceptical of its practical importance in time of ~~crisis~~ crisis or dispute. The universal acclaim with which the Queen was greeted on her recent Commonwealth tour is indicative of a superficial sentimentality, which, when allied with unity of ideals

interest and purpose is not to be underestimated, but on its own crumbles in the face of material opposition. For instance, one does not hear the Maltese dock-workers talking of their love and respect for the Monarchy when faced with unemployment. However, one cannot deny the vital nature of the Crown's role as a rallying point in both 1914 and 1939.

To set against the popular appeal of the Monarchy, several disturbing factors have arisen since the War, which throw a shadow of doubt over Britain's ability to lead the new Commonwealth to fruition. By no means least among these is our apparent inability to get to grips with our own internal problems, chief among these being the economic. Inflation and Industrial disputes take on a new significance when it is realised that we are being watched critically by ^{the} "undecided" nations of Africa and Asia. Anyway, no country incapable of governing itself has ever commanded respect in the international field. The very essence of leadership is that it should be incisive, confident and unquestionable. Yet on the occasion recently when Britain was stung to action in the Middle East, the action, unjustified if not unjustifiable, was conducted in such a way as to arouse the scorn and indignation of Communist and Democratic countries alike, not excluding Australia and New Zealand, and resulted in a prolonged economic crisis. This does not bode well for the future, as it is the one sphere of action over which we have complete control, and which is of the utmost importance.

Britain's relations with U.S.A. and Europe also lay claim to be discussed here as they will have ^a profound influence upon our position within the Commonwealth. The basis of this country's status as leading world power in the Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was unrivalled naval superiority, but our vulnerability as a nation depending to a great extent on imports was shown clearly in the late War. As an offensive strategy, naval supremacy has been outmoded by the development of the aeroplane and more recently, the missile, and as in any future war the emphasis will be on speed of action, the Commonwealth will by virtue of its diversity, be at a considerable

disadvantage; neither had it the depth of material resources of U.S.A. or U.S.S.R.. It seems then that, economically our future lies with Europe, and military with U.S.A., that is if present trends are continued. I will deal later with the economic effects of closer contacts with Europe; it is worth noting that co-operation with ~~France~~ France in any European Federation will involve us directly with a colonial policy, the exact antithesis of our own - a problem which will call for the utmost discretion at Government levels. With U.S.A the position is somewhat different. Many people feel that this country with its immense material resources has assumed the rôle of Champion of Western ideals, and that to introduce another bloc inside the West is to ~~complicate~~ complicate matters unnecessarily. The possible consequences of this all too prevalent "bloc-mentality" were clearly stated recently by a prominent Indian journalist who wrote: "The ultimate, though not intended effect of U.S.A's diplomacy may be to promote the security of the individual members of the Commonwealth ~~at the expense of the unity of the Commonwealth~~ as a whole". Here lies the true challenge to our position as leader of the Commonwealth. Economically we are becoming part of Europe, militarily we are overshadowed by the might of U.S.A. How then are we going to appeal to the new nations of Africa and Asia, command their respect and gain their spontaneous acquiescence to our lead? - Something vital if the Commonwealth is to grow up. First of all we must show a sympathetic understanding of the internal problems facing these countries and be unstinting in our economic aid towards them - present policy in this direction is completely satisfactory. Secondly we should make concerted efforts to eliminate frictions within the Commonwealth; and thirdly, while unashamedly admitting our military dependency on U.S.A., we should preserve unimpeachable moral standards in international politics, always standing up for what we hold to be Right. If we can convince these countries that Might and Right are not always synonymous we will have done great service to the cause of World Peace. With respect to this, expeditions against Egypt, use of the Veto in the U.N.O. Security

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and further participation in the international rat-race to see who can make the biggest bang are not promising omens. Britain must aim at near perfection, in order that India, Pakistan and Malaya can achieve some degree of imperfection. Neither can the possibility of the Commonwealth breaking up under external pressures be excluded from consideration; though in the past complete unity of action behind Britain has been ^{the} most constant factor in international diplomacy. The speed and effectiveness with which Canada, Australia and the other self-governing members came voluntarily to our aid in 1939, and that after our pathetic attempts at appeasement, provides a solid foundation for our hope in the future. Again, however, it must be pointed out that the same criteria of co-operation cannot be applied to India and Australia; it would be unreasonable to lament the break up of the Commonwealth should India remain neutral in a war, in which alliance with Britain would clearly run contrary to her national interests - as may well happen. On the other hand, India does present a series of problems concerning the whole Commonwealth, which shows distressingly little sign of being solved. First of all there is her avowed hostility ~~two~~ and other Commonwealth countries: towards Pakistan on religious and territorial issues and towards South Africa on account of her intransigent racial policy, which concerns the large Indian minority. War between India and Pakistan would place Britain in an impossible situation and must be averted at all costs, yet we seem curiously reluctant to mediate between them from a position of strength. Splits like these cannot remain if the Commonwealth is to attain maturity, India's position is the more vital, since the struggle for the hegemony of the ^{Far} East lies between her representing Democracy, and Communist China, on the result of which ~~is~~ the future of areas like Indonesia will depend. As for the other older members, the future in this sphere may be approached with almost unbridled optimism. A tradition of successful co-operation has been established which will not easily

be broken. Naturally, the difficulties of co-ordinating policy remain the same as before - long-term policies tend to be platitudinous and a detailed policy is often obsolescent before the Ministers have returned from the Conference which decided on it. However, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences regular contact at the United Nations and tours such as the one upon which Mr. Macmillan is now engaged can do much to remedy this and prevent misunderstandings; but this in no way removes the burden from Britain, of taking the vital decisions and fulfilling her position as leader. And when the decision to go to war was taken, Commonwealth unity was even more apparent, as the forces of all member countries were, and still are, interchangeable, being of standardised design. Thus a Canadian sergeant could command at a moments notice, an Australian platoon and every order he gave would be understood, drill and equipment would be the same. The obvious advantages of this standardisation do not obtain where U.S.A. and Britain are concerned and this constitutes one great reason why the Commonwealth should remain British in character while making the best possible use of American economic aid and bases, for it will be of vital importance if future wars are to be fought with Conventional weapons; but if man is in fact determined to destroy himself then it matters little whether we are to be atom-bombed as the forty-ninth State or as the leader of the Commonwealth.

The only grounds for doubting the unity of the "white" Commonwealth in this sphere arose over the Suez adventure in 1956.

British action was repudiated and condemned by Australia, New Zealand and Canada and our powerlessness without their aid was made clear to the World. But whereas the Imperialist might sigh for the days when we could have martialled their ~~xxx~~ resources for our own ends, the Liberal might rejoice at the fair-mindedness of these countries and say that this proved Britain had done a good job. Whatever are one's views on this, it cannot be denied that maintenance of a ~~xxxx~~ status quo does not constitute progress, and this is what has occurred within the Commonwealth since 1939-1945, when an

exceptional degree of military and diplomatic unity was achieved. Where is now scope for improvement is in co-operation with the countries which gained responsible government since 1945, built on the basis of unity among the older members; but the signs of progress are not very many, Commonwealth unity being impaired by disagreements involving India, Pakistan, South Africa, Malta and Cyprus.

The biggest economic problem facing the Commonwealth is the weakness of Sterling on the World Market. True, the Sterling area and the Commonwealth are not quite identical, but anything which affects the economic position of Britain is of consequence to all member countries. The reasons for this weakness are threefold, and all have their roots in the last War. Firstly there is inflation in Britain, then a shortage of dollars and lastly there are heavy demands for capital by the countries of the Commonwealth. The net result of this situation is that the banker-customer relationship on which the Sterling area is based, has been placed under great strain. The Sterling balances held by overseas countries amount to four times our gold and dollar reserves. If inflation at home induces speculation against Sterling on a large scale, the dangers are obvious, and it could even reach the point where sterling-area countries speculate against Sterling out of fear of devaluation. The obvious way out would seem to be to lend less money abroad and to renounce our pledge to repay sterling balances "on the nail" - to abolish the transferable sterling system. This policy would have two results, one of them harmful to Commonwealth development. First of all it would lessen the importance of the City of London as a dollar-earner, and secondly, and more vital, it would mean the curtailment of the Commonwealth development programme. Australia, New Zealand, India, Malaya and Ghana all in need of ~~capital~~ increased capital resources would be retarded in their economic growth, and this would do irreparable harm to the Commonwealth's chances of growing up.

Fortunately, however, despite seemingly overwhelming odds, the Sterling system continues to function and the government does not

seem inclined to take the drastic measures noted above. On the contrary Mr. Macmillan has just pledged more economic aid to India to speed up her industrialisation and there are no signs that he intends to alter the policy by which Britain from 1945-55 supplied 70% of all capital to Commonwealth countries. Add to this ^{the} fact that gold and dollar ~~reserves~~ reserves are increasing and that a very real attempt is being made to get to grips with internal inflation and one has the feeling that the problem is at least being approached in an adventurous way: that we are prepared to take risks and back our own horse, rather than abdicate our position and responsibility and cut our losses. A comparison with the United Provinces at the end of the War of Spanish Succession is not unprofitable; they found themselves in 1715 in a similar situation, became overawed by their debts, security-minded and finally sank into obscurity. There are encouraging signs that this will not be the case with Britain which extend to the field of international trade. Here there is at last evidence that we are escaping from the imperial-preference-complex, adopted in a crisis at the Ottawa Agreement 1932 and clung to desperately ever since, under the false assumption that the Depression was in fact the normal state of World Trade and that Sterling needed a defensive trade system. In fact this has largely excluded ~~xxx~~ Britain from trade with Europe, the vigorous and expanding area of World Trade. The Commonwealth realised before Britain that their interests did not lie in Imperial Preference and was unanimous in its ~~x~~ consent for Britain to join the European Common Markets. On top of this there is the Diefenbaker - the Thorneycroft proposal to enlarge Anglo-Canadian Trade by freeing it from tariffs. This represents a welcome challenge to British farmers and Canadian industrialists in particular and to the other Commonwealth countries in general. It is understood that these proposals and others will be discussed at a Commonwealth Trade Conference later this year; but whatever the outcome, the situation does not merit pessimism.

One of the minor results of the First World War was an increase in autonomous government gained by our "white" colonies. One of the major results of the Second World War was an irrepressible tide of

nationalism which swept through Asia and Africa and carried a whole host of minor colonies to independence on its crest. If the First War set the pattern for future colonial development, the Second set the seal on its fate. For the liberal ideal these were ~~xxx~~ tragedies of the highest order. Europe returned to petty nationalistic rivalries and universalism went by the board. 1939-45 set up a would-be Mussolini or a third-rate Hitler in every colony, after all these were the colourful dynamic ~~fm~~ figures of Europe, better than the insipid Liberalism on which their minds had been nourished for years. Also as a result of the Second War, these territories "acquired the physical force of the West, without losing the moral force derived from their own traditions" (Carrington). Thus in the period immediately after the War, Britain was faced with a dilemma: Either retire gracefully, but against our better judgement, and confer self-government upon all and sundry, or else resist these clamours, by force if necessary, until such time as we should consider these countries ready for self-government. Really the choice is not there, the latter road always being the road to ruin, as was ably illustrated by the French in Indo-China and the English in Ireland. Once a nation has the bit between its teeth nothing short of Auschwitz and Buchenwald can stop it, and continued resistance results only in a less-harmonious final settlement.

In India for example British rule failed to educate the natives in the preconditions of self-government, only in its desirability. When in 1947 free Pakistan and ~~free~~ free India were created, they promptly staged a war in which more people were killed than in the First and Second World Wars put together. Burma was granted independence and immediately seceded from the Commonwealth. After that, the rot stopped; India and Pakistan elected to remain within the Commonwealth, and since then Malaya, Ghana and the (Central African Federation) have attained Dominion Status relatively quietly, and when Nigeria and the West Indies follow in the near future, the territories under direct British rule will, apart from West Africa, consist of small islands, whose best interests would be served by integration with a larger Dominion: Malta with Britain, Fiji with New Zealand, for example.

Liberal principles and above all Britain will then be on trial in conditions of self-imposed difficulty. The success or failure of the British imperialists to establish in the native colonies, the institutions in which democratic party-government and a conscious national ~~exp~~ opinion may develop depends less on their efforts in the past than on our present ability and willingness to broaden our concept of Commonwealth, to relax strict ideals and to lower certain standards. It is extraordinary to think that in 1948 when India was admitted to the Commonwealth as a Republic, the total population was trebled and the proportion of English-speaking people fell from $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{5}$ th. This was a great step in the right direction as was the Colombo Plan in 1950 by which the richer countries of the Commonwealth gave economic ~~a~~ aid to their under-developed fellows. But much more understanding, sympathy and generous aid is needed, for these new nations present vast new problems which have only just begun to be appreciated let alone solved. The unity and maturity of the old Commonwealth is assured and leaves little to be desired. To be content with this, however, or to fail to gain similar relationships with at least some of the native Dominions would be tantamount to a break-up of the Commonwealth for it would be an admission that democratic ideals were not universally ~~apli~~ applicable. On the other hand, success would mean that the Commonwealth had in fact grown up. At the moment the issue is very much in the balance, with the scales slightly weighted against success.

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