

ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY.

ESSAY COMPETITION.

CLASS A.

1959.

CANDIDATE NO. 83.

B. Kitchenor,

Linwood High School,
Christchurch,
N.Z.

V - 0

A - 0

W - 1

What are the links and loyalties that
hold the Commonwealth together in the
second half of the twentieth century?
and are they likely to hold?

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION: diversity of Commonwealth members.

CROWN IN THE COMMONWEALTH: Queen - Head of the Commonwealth - constitutional monarchy - Governors-General - visits by Queen.

BRITISH TRADITION: parliamentary democracies - common law - judicial appeal - common language - sport-consciousness of these traditions - British Association.

ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: Imperial Preference - value of Preference - Sterling Area - multilateral trading - Development Capital from Britain - sources of finance - reference to Asian members.

DEFENCE: Co-operation with Britain - bilateral agreements - regional agreements.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS: foreign policy - Commonwealth Relations Office.

LESS IMPORTANT LINKS: Church - Cinema - Broadcasting - Nationality - Bilingualism - Voluntary Association - Press.

CO-OPERATION: Educational and Scientific - organisations in Britain - Trans-Antarctic Expedition - regional co-operation - Colombo Plan.

CONSULTATION: Commonwealth Prime Ministers - Cabinet Ministers - Government officials - Circulation of Information - High-Commissioners.

ORGANISATIONS: Economic Affairs - Commonwealth Economic Committee - Commonwealth Liaison Committee.
Scientific Co-operation - Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux - British Commonwealth Scientific Liaison

Offices (London).

Educational Co-operation - British Council.

Communications - Commonwealth Shipping Committee -
Commonwealth Air Transport Council - Commonwealth
Telecommunications Board.

Promotion of Commonwealth Principles - Royal
Commonwealth Society.

General - Imperial War Graves Commission.

FUTURE: equality of status - European Common Market -
culture - areas of tension - Indian neutrality -
Communist infiltration.

CONCLUSION: United Strength of Commonwealth.

Though the ten independent, self-governing and equal countries of the Commonwealth vary widely in history, geographical position, race, religion, tradition and language, they were, at one stage in their development, the responsibility of Britain and now form the British Commonwealth of Nations. This dynamic institution, for all its diversities, has several basic links responsible for its present-day unity.

The only formal bond is the Crown. As Head of the Commonwealth, the Queen is recognised by all members as the symbol of the free association between them. The effectiveness of this position relies on the cohesion of the members. It shows to the world that there is a formal bond of unity. In the realms of the Commonwealth - Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ghana and Ceylon - the Queen is Head of State. In this respect the Queen is a constitutional monarch, who reigns but does not rule. India, Pakistan and Malaya accept the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth, but they do not regard her as Head of their countries. She is represented in the realms, excluding Britain, by a Governor-General who is appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Government of the country concerned. The Governor-General does not receive advice or control from Britain.

Although the Queen has a separate Style and Title in each of her realms, this point does not reduce the strength of unity.

It is significant that Britain cannot change the form of succession to the Throne without consulting all Commonwealth governments.

The Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, has, in recent years, visited most of the monarchical countries of the Commonwealth - Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa - which have in turn shown their loyalty to the Throne by their receptions to the Royal couple.

While the personality of the Queen remains the distinguishing link as Head of the Commonwealth, the system of parliamentary institutions and common law is an almost equally important link. Although not all the Commonwealth countries are traditionally British they have been built up by the development of the British democratic way of life to the position at which it has arrived today. All the Commonwealth countries are proud of their parliamentary democracies - responsible government. With the exception of New Zealand, Pakistan and Ghana, all the Commonwealth countries have bicameral parliaments, similar to that at Westminster.

While each member of the Commonwealth has its own separate independent judiciary, the system of law is to a great extent common to all. There are exceptions, such as South Africa and Ceylon where the basis is Roman Dutch law, but elsewhere the foundation is generally the English common law.

The system of judicial appeal provides a common institution for some members. Legal precedent and decision

remain important elements in maintaining a sense of common practice amongst the Commonwealth countries.

One of the influences which have helped towards the unity of the Commonwealth is the possession of a common language - English, even as a second language. The great stories of English literature, enshrining British traditions and objectives, have been available throughout the Commonwealth.

These features of British tradition are shared by all members.

In the British tradition, games on an international level, play a great part in stimulating patriotism and unity.

On major international issues the peoples of the Commonwealth tend to think remarkably alike because they share these traditions.

One important influence towards cohesion, often underestimated in Britain, is the consciousness among Commonwealth peoples of their common culture, the product of a common literature and education and other traditions and institutions, which operates strongly even among the Asian members. Pride and interest in the common cultural heritage of the Commonwealth countries is stimulated by the gatherings of scholars of the British Association.

These traditions have, over the last century, been firmly established in the Commonwealth countries. In the last few decades these countries have received as much benefit from their economic co-operation.

It is the practice of the Governments of all the Commonwealth countries and of most of the Colonies to grant a tariff preference on dutiable goods and produce imported from other Commonwealth countries. Certain colonies and trusteeship territories are precluded from doing so by the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs. Almost fifty per cent of the Commonwealth countries' trade is with each other and the Imperial Preference granted is essential economically to all. The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs permits the retention of these preferences but allows for no change and the Commonwealth countries have not tried to alter this rule. While this system provides very few advantages in major fields of trade it does give opportunities to certain specific industries, such as Indian textiles, Malayan rubber, South African wines and Australian canned fruits, which they would not otherwise possess.

All Commonwealth countries except Canada, plus Burma, Iraq, Iceland, the Irish Republic, Jordan, Libya and the British Protected States in the Persian Gulf are members of the Sterling Area, that is, the bulk of their foreign trade is financed in sterling. There is a strong unity between the members because it has compelled them to co-operate in trying to solve the problem of balance of payments with the dollar countries, notably the United States. To the overseas members of the Commonwealth, the obvious advantage of membership of the Sterling Area is that it makes possible multilateral trading in the wide area within which sterling is freely transferable. Britain's

exports have a favoured position in Sterling Area countries, even where Imperial Preference is not granted. These advantages are possible so long as each member preserves its balance of payments and there is not a run on the reserves. It is the strength of sterling that provides the backing for the Sterling Area and such advantages as overseas members derive from it.

Each member of the Commonwealth has traditionally looked to Britain for a large part of its development capital and thus Britain is their major source of finance. Britain is the only net long-term investor abroad and between 1953 and 1957 the average amount of British investment in the Commonwealth was two hundred million pounds a year. Finance is made available to Commonwealth countries from Britain, through the London market, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Commonwealth Development Finance Company Limited which was established to help in financing development primarily by lending where normal channels are inappropriate, and private investors. The interests of each Commonwealth country will be advanced provided British investors are prepared to assist financially. Although member-nations are equal one to another, this fact is not recognised in the money market.

The Commonwealth countries have concluded reciprocal agreements for the elimination of double taxation. Britain has reciprocal arrangements with other Commonwealth countries and dependencies which have similar social insurance schemes, for the payment of benefits.

When the Asian Dominions were admitted they had already realised the benefits of British association, especially in the fields of trade, investment and technology and in services such as shipping and banking. Membership of the Sterling Area was a valuable asset and was essentially British as the Commonwealth Prime Ministers were the only people who decided policy.

Mr. Nehru has occasionally referred to the economic advantages - Imperial Preference and membership of the Sterling Area - which India gets from being in the Commonwealth. British capital figures prominently in the mining industry in South Africa. Malaya has been built up economically by British capital and wishes to keep this investment.

Thus it will be seen that economic co-operation aids the participants economically and binds them tightly together.

Another combined effort is required in the matter of defence. No state of the Commonwealth can achieve security in isolation.

Although each country is free to organise its own defence, there is a great deal of co-operation among the Commonwealth countries, by way of discussions at the highest political level, visits by high-ranking officers of the armed services, exchanges of information, combined exercises, standardisation of equipment, training and organisation and the provision of facilities, to mention a few instances. The Commonwealth members would find it difficult to obtain such facilities elsewhere.

While bilateral agreements exist between members, for

example, between Britain and Ceylon, and while all or some of the members participate with foreign states in general or regional commitments, for example, the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Commonwealth itself is not a military alliance. Even India sends representatives to discussions of Commonwealth Chiefs of Staff and sends her ships to exercise with those of other Commonwealth members. In addition to the defence agreements between Britain and individual Commonwealth countries, the Prime Ministers have agreed on the broad lines of the Commonwealth's strategic effort.

Nearly all members have undertaken obligations to regional associations, for example, Britain and Canada have joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation while Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand and Britain are members of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation. The Australia-New Zealand Agreement 1944, established a degree of co-ordination in foreign policy and regional defence matters. All these agreements and organisations aim at military preparedness against World Communism.

The Commonwealth has no defence organisation and in foreign affairs each member-nation is responsible for its own policy but they often discuss their policy together. It is now the principal function of the Commonwealth Relations Office in London to inform members on every aspect of foreign affairs and to indicate at an early stage the probable course of British policy so that the Dominion Governments may have an opportunity

of expressing their views before decisions are taken. The Commonwealth Relations Office works in close liaison with the Commonwealth Liaison Department, a department of the Foreign Office that supplies the Relations Office with all the information it requires.

These are not the only links that unite the Commonwealth but are the most important. Some other links are:

Blood connections, that is family ties, which are very close.

The Church. Most churches have established closer relations with their associated churches in the Dominions, than with those in foreign countries.

The Cinema. Educational films dealing with the life and conditions of the Commonwealth countries are specially prepared and shown by a number of educational and public organisations in Britain and the Commonwealth.

Broadcasting. Every part of the Commonwealth now receives an Empire broadcasting service from the British Broadcasting Corporation and the latter transmits continually to its listeners at home programmes from other Commonwealth countries. Every aspect of life in Britain is broadcast all over the Commonwealth, especially the Queen's Christmas Message. Visitors from the Commonwealth broadcasting services regularly attend courses at the British Broadcasting Corporation's Staff Training School and also spend varying periods on attachment to appropriate departments.

Nationality. In the law of nationality, each member grants

certain privileges to emigrants from other Commonwealth countries, to distinguish them from foreigners. Australia and New Zealand have assisted passage schemes for migrants from Britain, the former with the financial co-operation of the British Government.

Bilingualism. In South Africa the development of bilingualism provides for the maintenance and development of Afrikaans, which has a growing literature, but it also encourages the spread of English and cultural infusion from Britain.

Voluntary Association. A quality of the British people which has also had an important effect in promoting the unity of the Commonwealth is their zeal for voluntary association. Many of these associations deal with social matters and health, but even in a parliamentary connection, such voluntary bodies exist and have been valuable.

The Press. Co-operation between the newspapers, periodicals and news agencies of the Commonwealth is fostered by the Commonwealth Press Union. Reuters Limited is owned by the British Press, the New Zealand Press Association and the Australian Associated Press.

Of the greatest importance is the educational and scientific co-operation among Commonwealth members. The British Council makes travel grants and, like the Nuffield Foundation awards post-graduate research scholarships. The Goldsmith's Company London, the Commonwealth Bursaries Scheme and the Rutherford Memorial Scheme assist Commonwealth scientists. The Athlone Fellowship Scheme helps Canadian engineers to study in Britain.

The Rhodes Trust and the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth promote the exchange of university teachers and students between Commonwealth countries.

There is close collaboration between Commonwealth countries on atomic energy, particularly in relation to its use for peaceful purposes. A unique form of scientific co-operation was the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, which was described by the British Prime Minister as an outstanding example of joint Commonwealth effort.

An approach to "watching" Communism, laying emphasis on welfare rather than armed defence, is the Colombo Plan, an outstanding project of regional co-operation. Britain, New Zealand and Australia as well as India, Pakistan and Ceylon, have contributed financially and by the loan of experts, the provision of scholarships and by giving technical assistance generally.

The governments of Australia, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, Britain and the United States are members of the South Pacific Commission, the aims of which are purely social and economic. The object of the Caribbean Commission is to promote social and economic welfare in the Caribbean territories administered by Britain, the United States, the Netherlands and France.

Consultation between member-governments constitutes a most important phase of Commonwealth co-operation. Meetings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers are held in London at various

intervals. The meetings are made up of the Prime Ministers of the ten independent countries of the Commonwealth as well as the Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, with the British Prime Minister presiding and members of the British Cabinet attending as required. They are held in secret for open session would destroy their very purpose, which is the frank and uninhibited exchange of opinion and information. The Prime Ministers issue no reports of the meetings, only uninformative communiques and they make no decisions. The main topics are status, foreign affairs and economic affairs. Members with common interests discuss them separately.

Commonwealth Finance Ministers have had special conferences from time to time, especially on the problem of the dollar deficit in the Sterling Area. Such functional conferences at Ministerial level are becoming a recognised means of consultation.

There is a growing tendency to multiply contacts between higher civil servants and their "opposite numbers" in other Commonwealth countries.

Parliamentary consultation has not been developed very much but is furthered by conferences of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which was founded to facilitate the exchange of visits and information between members of Commonwealth legislatures, and meets at different capitals.

In addition to meetings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, there is a constant flow of messages between the Commonwealth Relations Office in London and departments of the Commonwealth governments in their capitals. However, the distinctive

diplomatic agents who carry on the process of consultation are the High Commissioners. There are British High Commissioners in all the Commonwealth capitals and High Commissioners from all the member-nations in London but not all the overseas members are represented in each other's capitals. It is customary for the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations to meet the assembled High Commissioners regularly. The High Commissioners are equal in status with Ambassadors.

The foregoing represents the main links that make for the unity of the Commonwealth, but to maintain this unity many "Commonwealth" organisations have been established.

In economic affairs the Commonwealth Economic Committee makes reports on any economic subject submitted to it by any of the Governments and provides economic intelligence services on production, trade and marketing matters of special interest to Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth Liaison Committee does the day-to-day work of examining the operations of the Sterling Area and recommending policy. There are also the Royal Economic Society and Royal Statistical Society.

In the field of scientific and educational co-operation, the ten Agricultural Bureaux which are primarily concerned with the dissemination of information and the British Commonwealth Scientific Liaison Offices (London) which acts as points of contacts between the scientific organisations of the member-nations for the communication of scientific ideas and information, are the most important but there also exist:

Imperial Institute
Imperial College of Science and Technology
Empire Bureau of the British Medical Association
Imperial Mycological Institute
Institute of Entomology
Bureau of Hygiene and Tropical Diseases
Department of Scientific and Industrial Research of
Britain
Royal Society of Arts
Dominions' Fellowship Trust

The British Council and the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth have already been mentioned.

Inter-Commonwealth communications are cared for by the Commonwealth Shipping Committee, the Air Transport Council and the Telecommunications Board which are advisory bodies with headquarters in London, the function of which is to co-ordinate the demands and interests of the various member-nations and recommend joint arrangements which may harmonise these. Of less importance are:

Commonwealth Empire Radio for Civil Aviation
Committee for Air Navigation and Ground Organisation

Of those organisations established to further Commonwealth understanding the Royal Commonwealth Society is the most important. This Society provides a place of meeting for British subjects in Britain and Commonwealth countries who are in sympathy with the objects of the Society and wish to promote the interests of the Commonwealth and British subjects and persons of direct British parentage resident in foreign countries.

The Victoria League
Overseas League

English Speaking Union of the Commonwealth
Institute of Commonwealth Studies
Commonwealth Youth Council

have similar objectives.

There also exist certain regional associations which aim at promoting the Commonwealth principles, for example, the Royal Asian Society.

Such are the links, but will they hold?

Although the Statute of Westminster stated that the "Dominions are equal in status", it is the fear that membership of the Commonwealth implies any subordination to Britain which might break the Commonwealth, but future events will determine the fate of intra-Commonwealth relations.

A run on the reserves of the Sterling Area would disrupt the whole system and leave Britain, especially, financially worse off.

If Britain were to join the European Common Market, she would no longer be able to grant the other Commonwealth countries preferences and they would be less able to sell their goods in Europe. If Britain remains out of this trading group, the whole Commonwealth would sell less in Europe and thus the member-nations would rely on each other again.

Even though some countries of the Commonwealth have developed a "national character" of their own, that is tending to weaken the common heritage to some extent, the common element of culture is still strong enough to be a most important force of mutual attraction.

The long-standing grievance of Indian Governments against the treatment of Indians in South Africa remains unsolved.

The policy of South Africa, of racial segregation has been a frequent target for the Asian members of the Commonwealth in the United Nations. If other Commonwealth countries interfere in South Africa, intra-Commonwealth relations would deteriorate.

India and Pakistan are still undecided as to whom is the rightful owner of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Other Commonwealth governments have tried to solve this problem but so far, without success.

If any disputes arise in these three positions, the unity of the Commonwealth could be broken, but each country involved is afraid of precipitating a general war. Another action that has given rise to tension is Mr. Nehru's policy of maintaining neutrality.

Communist infiltration into Commonwealth countries, if powerful enough, could ruin the Commonwealth system.

If the Commonwealth can surmount these difficulties, it will remain a united body. Personally I think it will, but no-one knows what lies ahead on the International scene.

In conclusion, the unity of the Commonwealth is powerful enough to make the British Commonwealth of Nations the equal of the United States and Russia, a fact which today is of vital importance to the free world.

P.T.O.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| "The British Commonwealth" | E. Grigg. |
| "Twentieth Century Empire" | H. V. Hodson. |
| "Britain, Commonwealth and Empire, 1901-55" | P. Knaplund. |
| "The British Commonwealth" | Ed. D. Shiels. |
| "The British Commonwealth of Nations" | I. Jennings. |
| "The British Family of Nations" | J. Coatman. |
| "Consultation and Co-operation in the Commonwealth" | COI Reference Pamphlet. |
| "The Commonwealth Association in Brief" | COI Reference Pamphlet. |
| "What is the Commonwealth?" | COI Reference Pamphlet. |
| "The Background to Current Affairs" | D.W.Crowley. |
| "Consultation and Co-operation in the Commonwealth" | H. Harvey. |
| "The Commonwealth in the World" | J. D. B. Miller. |
| "The Commonwealth Relations Office List, 1958" | |
| "Empire and Commonwealth Year Book, 1957-8" | |
| "Commonwealth Survey, 1957" | |
| "Commonwealth Survey, 1958" | |
| "Round Table Magazine" Nos. 175 - 195. | |