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CLASS A

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Summary

The Commonwealth, covering a quarter of the world's land surface and containing about a quarter of its population, is faced by many menacing problems. Many of these problems arise out of the freedom of Commonwealth members to determine their own foreign and internal policies, and sign treaties, military or otherwise, with any nation they wish. The Commonwealth has no common and particular foreign policy and its member nations are wholly responsible for the policies they adopt. Among these problems may be mentioned India's neutral policy, the Anzus Pact of 1951, the Indo-Pakistan disputes, the White Australia Policy, Ghana's policies, the nationalist movements in Nigeria and the Union of South Africa's foreign and internal policies which include her apartheid policy and her quarrels with the United Nations and India. The United Kingdom has many times been criticized and charged by Communist and anti-colonial countries in the United Nations with unfairly preventing the colonies from having the right to manage their own affairs. Thus Afrikaner nationalism - the expression of an outlook quite alien to the rest of the Commonwealth - seems the most serious disruptive force within the Commonwealth today.

"Briefly enumerate some of the main problems facing the Commonwealth today, and discuss one of them in some detail".

Ever since the dawn of history, there have arisen innumerable numbers of associations and organizations of men and women who have joined together for the furtherance of one primary subject. In all of these associations, the members find it necessary to devote an proportion of their time to meet and try to solve the many problems which incessantly arise to confront an association in its progress. Even a society of men of ancient tribes who joined together for hunting purposes had problems in the hostility of other tribes who accused them of trespassing. In fact, problems have occurred so regularly and frequently that they have unofficially become part of a society's work and to leave these problems unattended would be imprudent on the part of the society concerned.

On the strength of that basis, it would not be hard to understand why so many problems face the Commonwealth which, including the dependent territories, covers roughly a quarter of the world's land surface and contains about a quarter of its population. It embraces all the five continents and there is no race, no colour, no religion, and no climate which is not represented within its wide borders. Despite the fact that it is faced by so many serious and menacing problems and that within its member nations there is such a variety of outlook, tradition, environment, policy, speech and custom, yet all these territories and peoples combine themselves together as a loosely knit unit to obtain, broadly, a common outlook and a common objective and as a result, the Commonwealth is a democratic, solid, and workable association.

The Commonwealth is a free association of ten sovereign independent states - the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana and the Federation of Malaya, together with their dependencies. The Queen is the head of seven of these states while India and Pakistan are republics and the Federation of Malaya has its own Head of State. These latter countries do not owe allegiance to the Queen, but, together with the others, accept her as the symbol of their free association as Members of the Commonwealth, and as such the Head of the Commonwealth.

It is utterly essential to stress the fact that the Commonwealth is a voluntary association and that every sovereign independent member of the Commonwealth is in the association entirely of its own choice and will. In 1947 Burma decided to become a republic outside the Commonwealth and a year later Eire decided on the same course and became the Irish Republic. The Commonwealth as it is today consists of independent sovereign states and their dependencies. All the other Commonwealth members used to be British dependencies and there are still a number of dependencies which await self-government to be granted them by Britain. There is a profound difference in status between the sovereign states which, with Britain, make up the Commonwealth and the colonies which are still Britain's responsibility. No matter how rich or politically influential a colony may be, it cannot possibly have a foreign policy for it is still under Britain and the policy it adopts will naturally be that of the home government. An independent sovereign state, on the other hand, enjoys unrestrained control of its own affairs and hence it determines its foreign, domestic and fiscal policies. It also is free to define its citizenship and immigration regulations, negotiate and sign treaties with other nations, maintain diplomatic relations with any country it wishes and decide for itself the issues of peace and war.

When the First World War broke out in 1914 the entry of the United Kingdom into it automatically involved the rest of the Commonwealth; this is not so anymore. In 1939 when the Second World War broke out, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa declared war against Germany, Italy, and Japan entirely at their own discretion. Eire, then still a member of the Commonwealth, chose the neutral path and continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the countries with which the rest of the Commonwealth was at war.

Even though it is perfectly true that every Member of the Commonwealth is free to adopt its own foreign policy, yet we must not overlook the fact that the members' previous association with and dependence on Britain provides them with a very good guide to determination of foreign policy in all situations and under all circumstances. Their former colonial status and the British influence accompanying it are factors of immense importance; they are, however, not the only factors deciding the policies of Commonwealth members. The influence of the former association with Britain is only a guide and a help to the Commonwealth members; the lion's share, however, lies in the palms of the ruling government of the country concerned. It is, then, out of this freedom of Commonwealth countries to determine their own foreign policies, sign treaties, military or otherwise, with other nations that the greatest problem of the Commonwealth will arise. In short, the Commonwealth of Nations has no common and particular foreign policy and its member nations are wholly responsible for the policies they adopt. Therefore, they are individually responsible and contributing their share to the preservation of world peace and the promotion of human welfare by their allegiance to each other within the Commonwealth and by a common interest in the maintenance of peace, freedom, and world security. But it is not always possible for a member nation to adopt its foreign policy along the same line as that of the other member nations and that is one of the major problems facing the Commonwealth today as it affects the vital element which constitutes in making the Commonwealth into what it is today - unity. In short, the problem that faces the Commonwealth today is the conflict between the

persistence of the members to have full self-government and the necessity to preserve some measure of unity. Many authorities on this subject are of the opinion that the Commonwealth must either achieve closer unity or move onward to disintegration.

Because of its sheer size of population and land, India is of leading importance in the Commonwealth and the modern world and has the potentialities of a really great power. Besides, India is looked up to as a leader by the whole bloc of new nations whose foreign policies will in all probability be influenced to a great extent by that of India's. These uncommitted Afro-Asian countries cast many votes in the United Nations and their goodwill is fast becoming a main prize in the diplomatic contest between the two great blocs. It is therefore a matter of great concern to the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom in particular that so far India has pursued a policy of neutralism. The basic Indian aim is non-alignment with blocs because she believes that blocs add to the danger of the world and that if every country becomes aligned war will inevitably come. Furthermore, India wishes to be one of the powers of today's world politics and so if she enters a bloc, her independence as an incalculable element in politics will be destroyed. At the same time, she would be giving more encouragement to India's own Communists and would not be listened to with the same attention which she now receives. Mr. Nehru's speech before the Political Committee of the Asian-African Conference, April 22, 1955, gives us an idea of India's outlook*:-

" are we, the countries of Asia and Africa, devoid of any positive position except being pro-communist or anti-communist? ... It is most degrading and humiliating to any self-respecting people or nation."

* "The Asian-African Conference"
(Ithaca, NY., 1956; page 67)

Another problem which arises out of the foreign policies of Commonwealth members is the Anzus Pact of 1951. For a long time, the Dominions had looked to Britain's strength and influence as their main source of security and protection. Since 1945, however, Britain's relative weakness has made the Dominions realize that they can no longer rely on her for their defence and one of the results was the Anzus Pact, a mutual defence treaty signed between Australia, New Zealand and the United States. This Pact might be considered a point of strain within the Commonwealth because should Britain and the United States differ on a point of foreign policy, then Australia and New Zealand would be faced with an extremely difficult decision. Furthermore, their examples might lead other Commonwealth members to sign defence treaties with other countries not belonging to the Western bloc.

Another notable element of strain within the Commonwealth arises out of the internal policies of two of the members. Pakistan is in serious dispute with India over four questions: her departure from neutrality in foreign policy, compensation for refugees, the use of the waters of the Indus tributaries, and Kashmir. For the past twelve years, relations between the two Commonwealth members have been bedevilled by the two major disputes - Kashmir and the canal waters. Now, after prolonged negotiations, a solution of the canal waters dispute is in sight. India does not, however, like the recent Chinese border threats to be brought in as a factor in the consideration of Indo-Pakistan relations, and by any possibility of the two neighbours joining forces to defend the sub-continent is hampered by India's neutral policy. It is sincerely hoped that further negotiations on the major disputes will be made by the two countries for both now have the leaders in power who can come to an agreement that would end the bitterness which for twelve years has caused some embarrassment among the Commonwealth members. India has another quarrel with another Commonwealth member - South Africa. This long-standing dispute is about the treatment of Indians living in the Union.

The White Australia Policy adopted by that particular government to preserve the Australian "racial purity" and the distinctive Australian culture must be mentioned as one of the stumbling blocks of the smooth progress of the Commonwealth. This policy involves the danger of offence to the Afro-Asian members of the Commonwealth who think their blood is as pure as the Australians'. As a result of this policy, large stretches of Australia are left uninhabited and undeveloped while other places of the Commonwealth like Hong Kong are simply bursting with people increased considerably by the influx of non-white refugees unacceptable to Australia.

The Commonwealth members in Africa, with a total area of 1,500,000 sq. miles which is about four-fifths of the total area of all the United Kingdom Dependencies, present quite a number of problems to the Commonwealth. With the exception of Ghana and the Union of South Africa, the remaining members are dependencies and protectorates and with the rise of nationalism in Africa, are working rigidly and wholeheartedly to achieve independence. Because of these African colonies, the United Kingdom has many times been criticized and charged by Communist and anti-colonial countries in the United Nations with unfairly preventing these colonies from having the right to manage their own affairs. These critical countries, comprising a majority of the members of the United Nations and having in the past caused serious diplomatic embarrassments to the United Kingdom, do not, however, consider the fact that preparing primitive peoples for self-governing democracy is a difficult and arduous task, and of necessity a long one. Until this task is accomplished, the United Kingdom government will not abdicate its powers to a government incapable of exercising them for any subsequent hardships on the people will be shouldered entirely by the United Kingdom.

Largely from what happened in India, many of these African colonies now take advantage of the fact that if they can, through nationalist movements, embarrass Britain enough, she will give way. Besides, it is well known that Britain will not readily adopt the policy of violence to meet violence for this will result in the alienation of nations whose friendship and goodwill the Commonwealth needs. Thus African nationalism - the expression of an outlook quite alien to the rest of the Commonwealth - seems the most serious disruptive force within the Commonwealth today.

Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast, achieved its independence in March 1957. Its emergence to dominion status is not without significance for it will undoubtedly intensify the demands of the other colonies for independence. Furthermore, ever since her independence, Ghana has considered as her basic interest her help in the emancipation of Africans from colonial rule, including that of Britain. She has, in fact, embarked on a policy of leadership of Pan-Africanism and taken as its primary interest the advancement of African states. It will be appreciated that this poses great problems for the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom for as it is, even without Ghana's intention to emancipate Africa, her emergence as a nation, the consequences of which one cannot really blame her, has hastened the other colonies' demands for independence so much that the actual task of granting independence has been made more difficult for Britain. Since ability to govern is a skill that takes some time to acquire and requires some experience, the British authorities do not yet have any real confidence in the capabilities of those taking over. Then should the colonies, with Ghana's intention to emancipate Africa, resort to violent nationalist movements while Britain believes that should she abdicate her powers to an incapable government she would be responsible for the subsequent hardships, it would be very awkward if she made the wrong decision. Even though nearly three years have elapsed since her attainment of independence, Ghana has not yet developed a foreign policy and there is always the danger to the Western world of her joining the other bloc or remaining neutral.

But how effective her foreign policy will be, and to what ends it will be directed will depend very much on the treatment Ghana receives from other countries, and especially from her associates in the Commonwealth.

Nigeria, one of the dependencies, is filled with complaints against, and denunciations of, the British despite the fact that the British authorities have ruled justly and unoppressively and have brought law and order and equal justice to the land. Nationalism and demands for autonomy are stronger in Nigeria than in any other part of British Africa and there has been a nationalist movement in Nigeria for over twenty years. Dr. Azikiwe, leader of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons pledged himself to emancipate Nigeria from the so-called political thralldom, economic insecurity and social disabilities. He has founded a chain of half a dozen newspapers which are extremely nationalistic and anti-government, and through which he organized an autonomy movement. His newspapers emphasize on crimes or anything else in England which might lower England's prestige in Nigeria. Hostile feelings among predominant tribes, the presence of enormous differences in the levels of culture and the abnormally high rate of illiteracy among the population hamper Britain's wish to grant self-government to Nigeria. Unrest exists everywhere in British Africa but Nigeria has a special importance partly because of the intensity of the unrest there and partly because its population amounts to about half the total population of the British colonial Empire.

The foreign and internal policies of the Union of South Africa give rise to certain points of strain within the Commonwealth today. Her apartheid policy is directly opposite in principle to the traditional British racial policy of 'partnership'. In most of the African colonies, a small minority of European settlers occupy large areas of fertile land and are politically privileged while the native majority enjoy but very few of these privileges.

If the natives were to be advanced and received equal political rights, they would be in a position to pass laws discriminating against the Europeans. The British policy of partnership believes that this risk must be taken and hopes that the natives will realize the advantages of continued association with the Europeans. Not having the same outlook regarding the risk, the South African policy of apartheid resorts to the other impracticable alternative - to try to keep the natives in permanent subjection regardless of the progress of time. Again South Africa opposes the British policy of advancing colonies and objects to the emergence of non-European dominions on the belief that the natives there would not only prove ungrateful to Britain but also be a danger to South Africa through the example and the propaganda which they would provide. South Africa has on many occasions demanded the incorporation of the three Protectorates - Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland - into the Union. Britain's refusal to grant this, because of the Union's racial policies, is obstructed partly by the fact that the protectorates are economically dependent on the Union. Her long dispute with India regarding the presence in South Africa of 350,000 Indians has been intensified by the Indian charges that the apartheid policy is a breach of the promise of 1927 of the Union not to discriminate against the Indians. Her quarrel with the United Nations over her former mandated territory of South-West Africa which she refused to transform into a trust territory under the United Nations and has now incorporated into the Union, has also been a thorn in the side of the Commonwealth.

To be effective and able to influence the outside world through the United Nations, there must be unity within the Commonwealth which is a creature of growth and changes and develops to keep in step with this ever changing world of ours. The reason why the Commonwealth has remained what it is today is due to its continuing flexibility and vitality as shown by the decision that India - though, as a Republic, rejecting the Crown as an institution of her government - remains a full and equal member within the Commonwealth.