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ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY ESSAY COMPETITION 1984/85

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ESSAY CLASS A: Candidates 16 and under 19 on 31 December 1984.

ESSAY NUMBER: 5

EXACT LENGTH OF ESSAY: 1621 words

CERTIFIED BY:

W. B. Jones
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A -
172? prize
Good English, well balanced.
To the point. Ends well



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"If the Commonwealth does nothing more than give the world a lead in establishing the brotherhood of man, irrespective of race, creed or colour, it will have made a notable contribution to the cause of human welfare."

The Commonwealth of Nations is a voluntary association of independent sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace.

The forty-six member nations of the Commonwealth are situated in every part of the world. By faith, race, language and colour their peoples are of infinite variety. But they share certain traditions. In all of them there are shared techniques and attitudes, in government, in law, in education, in public and private life. All the member countries of the Commonwealth regard the principles of the Commonwealth as valid, not only for themselves, but as a contribution to the collective understanding and goodwill of all mankind.

The Commonwealth's commitment to the removal of disparities in wealth and to the achievement of a more just world society have led to regular consultations and co-operation in economic affairs. Nearly one fifth of total trade by Commonwealth members is done with other members, and some commodities are traded almost exclusively within the Commonwealth association. The Commonwealth has a particular commitment to the economic development of its less prosperous members and it is in this way that it is helping to "give the world a lead in establishing the brotherhood of man, irrespective of race, creed or colour." An example of where such assistance has been given is seen

through the results of the Colombo Plan. Under the Colombo Plan, financial and technical aid is given by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Britain for the development of the Commonwealth and other countries in south and south-east Asia. The Plan originated in 1950 and sought to improve the living standards of the people in Asia and the Pacific by reviewing development programmes and co-ordinating development assistance. Historically the aid programme began as part of the discharge of Britain's responsibilities towards dependent territories, and the main emphasis remains on the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth groups four of the world's leading nations and forty-two developing countries, including some of the world's poorest. It is a natural setting for co-operating for the common good. Member countries are active within multilateral aid programmes, contributing both money and expertise. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) concentrates on providing experts and training to fill specific manpower shortages in developing member countries. These include in particular, the development of skills within countries, the development of natural resources including agriculture, and the organisation of export capacity and techniques to help earn foreign exchange. The fund puts resources to work to match the skills of the Commonwealth to the needs of the Commonwealth, and in so doing provides a practical basis for co-operation in many areas. It is a unique manner of co-operation, because it is dissimilar to any traditional form of aid, in the fact that it is a system of mutual assistance. Its resources, expertise and training facilities, as well as money, are contributed by both developed and developing

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countries.

In several Commonwealth countries in Africa, Europeans in the last few generations have built up valuable farms from nothing and these produce much of the wealth which pays for roads, schools, medical services, railways and other services of a civilized modern state. Their skill and knowledge made it possible to exploit natural resources such as copper, sisal, tea and coffee. Thanks to European investment, giant projects like the Kariba Dam and the East African Railways and Harbours, helped Central and East Africa to further develop as industrial areas, though sadly the East African Railways and Harbours has now disbanded due to political strife between the three East African countries. Improvements in agriculture will also bring an improved standard of living. The Africans have benefited enormously from the presence of Europeans in their countries. The application of law and justice as a better way of settling arguments than inter-tribal warfare, modern medical care to combat little known and less understood diseases, a general increase in wealth following the advance of industrialization — all these things have helped to make life easier and safer for the African people.

Although eighty per cent of Britain's overseas aid each year goes to Commonwealth countries, this is only a small proportion of the needs of the developing countries. Many turn to other countries for most of their aid. Governmental co-operation in the Commonwealth is crucial but by no means everything. There is also a massive network of relationships between organizations and individuals in Commonwealth countries, more intimate and friendly than any other international group of such diversity.

Commonwealth co-operation in health programmes has been a tremendous aid towards the goal of "establishing the brotherhood of man" and this has been made possible through the broadly similar systems of medical schools and health services. The medical services formerly established by Britain in the developing countries of the Commonwealth assisted in the reduction of infant and maternal mortality, helped to control epidemic diseases and increased life expectancy. Commonwealth countries have taken advantage of their association to share experience, knowledge and training facilities. There is an important interchange of information, trainees and manpower between countries. An emphasis is placed on community health care so that people can have access to such services as family planning, child health, better nutrition, improved sanitation, immunisation, control over local diseases and improved health education.

In sport as well, the Commonwealth Games have been a tremendous asset in bringing peoples together. Held every four years in different Commonwealth countries, the games are designed to encourage amateur sport in the Commonwealth, and much is gained by competitors and officials of various countries meeting and competing in a friendly atmosphere at these Games. Many staunch and lasting friendships are formed on the sportsfields and visitors gain a first-hand appreciation of the people, their culture, the way of life, the problems, the attractions and the complexities of the host nation, which all helps towards achieving a greater understanding of each other.

The loyalty and indebtedness which Commonwealth nations felt for Britain was a great unifying

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factor, and the British Royal family have certainly done their part in keeping this alive by the frequent visits made by one or other of them to various Commonwealth countries — these visits are unparalleled in their popularity. In addition many of the royal family support various Commonwealth organizations either by sponsoring them or becoming their Patron.

Far as the Commonwealth has progressed towards establishing a true brotherhood of man, there are many factors causing a delay in the progression towards achieving this goal. Commonwealth members are scattered world-wide and this can tend to make them insular and concerned with their own problems. They do not speak with a single voice, or vote together in organizations such as the United Nations, and many of them have problems which membership of the Commonwealth cannot solve. Another impediment in many countries is discrimination of one sort or another. In Africa for example in the early days of the independence of many member nations the growing African population saw that much of the land producing the most valuable crops was that owned by the Europeans. In some places, they argued that — according to their own tribal customs — particular stretches of land belonged to certain tribes, but since they had no written documents, this was hard to prove and caused a great deal of anger and bitterness. Among the Europeans there was a genuine fear that the African majority would elect a government which would either put crippling taxes on the European landowners or simply take their land away, and among the Africans there was an equal fear that as in South Africa, Africans would be looked upon as second class citizens, who could never be accepted as equal partners with the Europeans.

The tribal system was also a major deterrent to peace and unity in many African countries. A similar problem exists in New Zealand between Maori and Europeans, stemming from ancient disputes over land rights. Some countries have their own in-built system of discrimination, for example India, with its caste system which is the cause of so much that is harmful in that country.

It also is sometimes difficult for the Commonwealth Association to help some member countries because of certain geographic or economic problems, where vast amounts of money are needed in order to overcome their particular difficulties. For example, land-locked Zambia had grave trading difficulties having no port of its own, and had to rely on neighbouring countries to permit imports and exports to go through those countries. This difficulty was only solved eventually by the amalgamation of Tanzania and Zambia in the building of the Tanzam Railway at very great expense and oddly enough with Chinese backing and expertise.

The majority of Commonwealth countries belong to the developing world and in an attempt to modernize their economies they are faced with enormous difficulties. Many countries are still dealing with tribal or racial loyalties where the customs of the old days act as a barrier to progress. The hunger and poverty suffered in some of the Third World countries are so atrocious that most people in developed nations are unable to visualize the extent of this deprivation. The richer nations are enclosed in a tight security blanket of governmental help — social security benefits — from childhood to old age, and find it difficult to imagine and sympathize with the absolute necessity for people in Third World

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countries to earn whatever income they can in order to survive. This fact is to some extent a hindrance to achieving "the brotherhood of man."

In conclusion, in the past the Commonwealth was held together by tradition, economic interest and common foreign and defense policies. These were the three broad bands which sustained it as an association of independent nations at varying stages of development and containing peoples of different races, colour and religion.

Much is being done, quietly and unobtrusively in the way of mutual help and co-operation. There are over seventy different official and unofficial organizations which deal with some aspect or other of Commonwealth affairs. Through these organizations, aid is going to the countries in need of it.

There is no doubt whatever that the Commonwealth has made a notable contribution to the cause of human welfare and has been a leader in establishing the brotherhood of man, irrespective of race, creed or colour.

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