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What are the Links and Loyalties which hold the Commonwealth together in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century and Are they likely to endure?

Summary:

What is the Commonwealth? -- introductory.

Links and Loyalties The British influence -- Similar, legislative, executive and judicial institutions -- The English language -- A common heritage -- Sentimental links and loyalties -- The Crown -- Importance of the invisible link -- Some examples of additional links.

Are they likely to endure? New developments since 1947 -- The Need for a change -- Present-day uncertainty -- South Africa -- Obsolete ideas and the nature of the necessary change -- "Haves" and "Have-nots" -- A need for international co-operation -- Value of the Commonwealth association -- Future development of the Commonwealth -- The fate of the association rests in the hands of the members.

Conclusion.

The Commonwealth is a free association of nations. The free and flexible form of association demonstrated in the Commonwealth is unique. It is not a federation, nor is it a contractual association, as the United Nations Organisation could be considered, for either of such forms of association necessitates the subjection of the power of member states to greater power. A notable feature of the Commonwealth is that all members retain their sovereign status undiminished. Neither is the Commonwealth solely a military alliance or economic group. The apparent lack of formal links between members of the Commonwealth prompts one to inquire what does hold them together and whether their association is likely to continue. Implicit in these two questions are two more. What disintegrating forces will the Commonwealth have to contend with? Should the Commonwealth countries consider changing their relationship? This might mean making some rules and conditions of membership of the Commonwealth - perhaps to the exclusion of one or more members - to avoid a possible collapse of the association as a whole or in order to work more effectively for its declared objects: peace, security and progress.

Each of the Commonwealth nations has at one time been under British rule. This common history of all the countries seems to be the great bond between them. The British influence shows itself in many ways. Political habits and institutions are broadly similar although they have been adapted to local needs. Members of the Commonwealth are all democracies. Any government must command a majority in Parliament; ministers are collectively

responsible for all government actions and must answer for them in Parliament. Apart from those of New Zealand, Pakistan, Ghana and Malaya the parliaments have two chambers. Legislation can be initiated in the upper houses but are chiefly revising chambers. Methods of choosing members of the upper houses vary. Their power is far less than that of the lower houses, for the government must have a majority in the lower house and the lower house alone is permitted to initiate or amend financial legislation. The duration of parliaments is limited, but they may be dissolved by the Queen or her representative (or by the Presidents of the republics) on the advice of the government concerned.

In Quebec Province, law is based on French law; in South Africa, Ceylon and Southern Rhodesia it is based on Roman Dutch law but throughout the rest of the Commonwealth it is based on English Common law - again modified to suit local needs. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the final court of appeal for Australia, New Zealand, Ceylon, Ghana and Malaya. Other members of the Commonwealth have reserved the final appeal for their own courts.

In addition to the links of similar legislative, executive and judicial institutions there are numerous other ties: professional, cultural and sporting. The English language is spoken everywhere. For many people it is their only language. This applies not only in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, where most of the population has British ancestors, but also in parts of India, Pakistan and Malaya and other countries with non-European populations. The official language of India, Pakistan and Malaya is, at present, English. There is a vast number of people who speak English as a second language and as it is used by so many people of the world, it will undoubtedly be taught in the Commonwealth for many years to come. A common language is a very important aid to understanding between two people or two nations. The countries with populations of British descent have special loyalties to each other. There are many families in the United Kingdom with branches in Australia, New Zealand, Canada or their dependencies. Some have branches in two of them, and some in all. This I call, for convenience, a sentimental link.

The legacy of a British administration, which the Commonwealth has received, is a way of behaving, thinking and talking. A common standard of values and way of living - British in origin - is the basis of what Mr. Nehru has termed "... That friendly approach, that sympathetic approach, that attempt, so far as one can, to go in step..." This seems to be what holds the Commonwealth together today.

Here are some observations on the Commonwealth by two great statesmen of our time. The first from a speech by Mr. Nehru:

"Somehow it has found some kind of invisible link by seeing that practically there is no link and by giving freedom and independence to every part of it."

Secondly, something Sir Winston Churchill once said:

"The Crown has become the mysterious link, indeed I may say the magic link which unites our loosely bound but strongly interwoven Commonwealth of Nations, States and races. Peoples who would never tolerate the assertions of a written Constitution which implied any diminution of their independence are the foremost to be proud of their loyalty to the Crown."

These remarks may appear to be a little contradictory. They can be satisfactorily reconciled however.

The truth is that the Crown is the visible symbol of an "invisible link". The invisible link I tried to describe in a previous paragraph. The function of the Crown as head of the Commonwealth is to symbolize the spirit of the Commonwealth association. I think it can be accepted that the Crown has little actual power in the Commonwealth and that its function is very largely symbolic. In this capacity the Crown does a great deal to help people to realize that the link of the Commonwealth exists. This link, which even Sir Winston Churchill finds "mysterious" and "magic" and which is so difficult to define can crystallize in the form of the Crown. Thus, although the people of India, Pakistan and Malaya do not have Elizabeth II as their head of state, yet they are quite right to acknowledge her as head of the Commonwealth. It is difficult to be loyal to an idea, especially one as intangible as the invisible Commonwealth link. The loyalties of Commonwealth peoples, apart from the "sentimental link" I mentioned above are to the Crown.

The link of the association as symbolized by the Crown is the basis for a great deal of consultation and co-operation and this in itself forms new links and loyalties. Frank and uninhibited exchanges of opinion take places at all levels and on varied topics. Commonwealth governments are in constant contact through their High Commissioners, the Commonwealth Relations Office in London and corresponding departments in other Commonwealth capitals. Prime ministers have meetings at convenient intervals (1951, 1953, 1955, 1956) on an ad hoc basis. Ministers may meet to discuss common problems (Finance ministers, 1954). The whole Commonwealth, Canada excepted, is in the Sterling area and there are numerous specialized agencies dealing with air transport, tele-communications or anything else on which a central pool of information or advisory council is desirable. Consultation does not commit parties to agreement or participation, but is useful in forming policies and is vital to the present-day Commonwealth.

I have indicated no more than a representative fraction of innumerable similar links. These are only a superstructure. They do not really serve to hold the Commonwealth together, except in that they give the association a function and make it come to life. Without common political ideals and a common heritage and language the Commonwealth would not exist. This is the hull that keeps the ship afloat. That hull is being modified and streamlined to meet new conditions. The basis of the Commonwealth association in 1960 is not the same as it was in the first half of the present century. It has changed and is still changing and will have to change further. In the first half of the century the countries of the Commonwealth which were full members were broadly of one race, one culture, one religion and one language. They had a deep-rooted common heritage. In the second half of the twentieth century this is no longer so because 1947 and 1948 saw the birth of the "new" Commonwealth.

The advent of the "new" Commonwealth in Asia, and latterly Africa, has created a new situation for there are now many races, religions, cultures and languages within the Commonwealth. R. Taylor Cole in a foreword to Sir Ivor Jennings' "Problems of the new Commonwealth" writes:

"It is not so much that the Asian members constitute a demographic preponderance of the total population of the Commonwealth; the crucial factor is that the Commonwealth must necessarily depend

less on a common language and heritage and more on a common devotion to political ideals for its future unity". That, briefly, is the problem of survival for the Commonwealth.

Unfortunately, the importance of political ideals to the future of the Commonwealth has not yet been generally realized. Consequently the Commonwealth is relying too much on the links of pre-war years and as these are no longer sufficient they are showing signs of strain. The most obvious cause of friction in the Commonwealth today is the South African governments' racial policy. I am not concerned here with the pros and cons of apartheid as a policy but it is necessary to take an objective view of the problem as it affects the Commonwealth link. In Africa, which at the beginning of the century was a continent made up almost entirely of colonial territories, there is now a strong and growing demand for self-government, the end of domination by "white" minorities of African populations and the government of Africans by Africans.

In the light of the fierce fire of African nationalistic and pan-African feelings apartheid is seen by many people in Africa and elsewhere as an attempt by a European minority to perpetuate its own superiority and suppression of the "coloured" population. On this account the South African government has been widely abused. Whatever truth there may be in the accusations made against that government, its relations with India and Ghana are naturally strained, for the governments of India and Ghana feel that Africans and Indians are treated as second-class citizens. Such racial suspicion and hostility is disastrous in a multiracial Commonwealth. As the Indians and Ghanians do not share fully with the South Africans the common language and heritage which the latter share with the old Commonwealth, and as their racial differences are over-emphasised, they must feel that they have little or nothing to hold them together.

The Commonwealth today is insecure because the new situation is not yet fully appreciated. Obsolete ideas are persistent. A surprisingly large number of people in Britain still uses "Commonwealth" synonymously with "Empire". Some regard the Commonwealth merely as a cushion for British pride - to soften the break-up of a large colonial empire. In present circumstances this point of view is understandable but I prefer to hope that this period of uncertainty is a period of change. Change however is vital. If there is no change the association will become meaningless. In contrast, the possibilities of a Commonwealth based on "a common devotion to political principles" are immense and inspiring. The political principles which must be the basis of the future Commonwealth are one facet of the link of the old one because they are part of British political behaviour in the Commonwealth. Political principles, however, are not confined to any one racial, religious or cultural group. The change required in the Commonwealth link is a change of emphasis. That part of the link concerned with a common language and heritage is not universally applicable and cannot therefore continue to be the mainstay of the Commonwealth association. Political principles which can be universally applied must be increasingly stressed. The Commonwealth has adapted itself to new circumstances in the past and it can do so again.

+Footnote: In talking of attitudes towards and ideas about the Commonwealth, I am thinking of those people hold unconsciously. If people were caused to think consciously about the Commonwealth obsolete ideas would be repudiated.

World population can be divided into "haves" and "have-nots". The "haves" are the pink-skinned peoples of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Africa. They live in highly industrialized and urbanized communities and enjoy a high standard of living. Even the poorest of the "haves" is rich by comparison with the average "have-nots". These unlucky people make up the two thirds of the world population that suffers from malnutrition - and they are the inhabitants of the underdeveloped countries. The wealthy nations have sufficient resources to enable the underdeveloped nations to develop themselves and raise their standard of living. The underdeveloped nations know this and they also know that the disparity in the two standards of life is growing, not shrinking. This situation is potentially extremely dangerous.

If the materially advanced nations do not acknowledge their responsibility to help the underdeveloped ones the latter may eventually be driven to retaliate by cutting food supplies or trade on which the industrial states depend or, alternatively, they may turn to communism to solve their economic problems. It is in the interests of the advanced states to help the others as fully as they can. Ultimately the whole human race is faced with the problem of survival. In the future there will be an increasing need for international co-operation to prevent widespread misery and hate. Nations will have to sink their national, racial, cultural and ideological differences in order to survive. The pressure of population on the limited resources of the earth and the inequality of distribution of those resources is the paramount problem of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. The Commonwealth contains both "have" and "have-not" peoples. Evidently an international organisation of this nature will be extremely important. Because there already exists within the Commonwealth the machinery for co-operation and because there is a mutual trust between Commonwealth countries, the association is in a good position to initiate the necessary large-scale capital investment in underdeveloped countries. The element of trust is important because while some help can come from governments, the bulk of overseas investment from the West is going to be by private enterprise. Western industry will not place capital where it thinks it is insecure. Co-operation will be necessary on taxation and currency exchange systems before industry will be tempted to break new ground. The Commonwealth link and trust should be sufficient to satisfy the demands of underdeveloped nations for investment "without strings".

Economic partnership of the prosperous and the underdeveloped nations in this way is the most direct and effective way of achieving those objects: peace, security and progress. While three quarters of humanity lives in poverty and two thirds suffers from starvation there can be no real lasting peace, security or progress. We have a responsibility to develop our colonial territories and to help the development of other nations, both for their good and for the good of the whole of mankind. John Strachey has recently published some of these thoughts on the future development of the Commonwealth in his book, "The End of the Empire".

Prominent people with markedly different political views have shown that they realize the responsibility this country has as the "mother" of the Commonwealth family. Among them is the British Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Harold Macmillan, M.P. and from his speech to the Conservative Women's Conference of 1959 come the following words:

"This similarity of moral outlook is a priceless thing linking us all together in a single purpose. But I have also been impressed as we all must be by the material needs in this world-wide family of nations. Words, and even principles are not enough. Many of these countries have growing even desperate needs..... Our new found solvency gives us the chance to see that they do not look to us in vain. We enjoy one of the highest living standards in the world. We must help others to climb nearer to our level."

This must surely be one of our great tasks in the second half of the Twentieth century....."

While such thoughts and speeches are not to be belittled it remains true that although seventy per cent of the external capital invested in the sterling area in recent years has come from the United Kingdom, this £200 million represents only about one and a quarter per cent of the gross national product. Financial assistance is not the only form of assistance needed but even so one and a quarter per cent is not sufficient. Schemes such as the Colombo Plan are steps in the right direction but they must be enlarged and multiplied. Strains on the Commonwealth links will be considerable but if the link is a common devotion to political principles, if there is a genuine effort to maintain the association, then the similarity of ideals and the need to keep together will overcome the tendencies to separate. Once the links of the Commonwealth in the second half of the twentieth century - essentially, they can only be common ideals - have been established there is no reason why they should not endure - if the members of the association so desire. It must be emphasised, however, that such an international organization cannot work effectively unless it is wholeheartedly supported by its members.

The question "What are the Links and Loyalties which hold the Commonwealth together in the second half of the Twentieth Century and are they likely to endure?" falls naturally into two parts. I have dealt with them separately. It remains for me to draw them together as a brief and coherent whole.

Commonwealth links and loyalties are derived from a period of British rule which left the Commonwealth nations with a common attitude to moral and political problems. This attitude has remained even where there are no additional links of common language and heritage. Where populations are of British descent there are links of race, language, religion and culture and sentimental loyalties. The invisible link which is the basis of the Commonwealth today is made up of all these elements together and being somewhat vague it is symbolized by the Crown. The entry of the Asian countries into the association after the second world war marked a turning-point in Commonwealth history. These countries have not the common heritage and language which were major links between Commonwealth countries in the first half of the century. So the link between them now must be far more definite, but as yet there does not appear to have been any real attempt to establish it. Consequently the Commonwealth is at present resting on the links of the pre-war Commonwealth and appears to be in a rather

precarious position. The new link is present in embryo and if it can once be established it will endure as long as it has the active support of the member nations of the Commonwealth. An association such as the "new" Commonwealth seems highly desirable both for members and for the rest of humanity. It would be good sense to spend considerable wealth and energy on making a success of the Commonwealth of the future; but man is not a rational animal.

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