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ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY ESSAY

- CLASS A.

### A List of Headings

- A. 1. Two governing factors: Administrative Ability and Economic Stability.
2. Examples to show these factors' importance -  
Canada, Newfoundland, the Caribbean Federation,  
British Guiana, and the Islands of the North Atlantic.
- B. 1. The state of the territories within the Commonwealth, and of  
former British possessions.
- In Asia: India; Pakistan, and Burma.
- In Africa: 1. Sudan; Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika;  
Somaliland Protectorate; Rhodesias and Nyasaland.  
2. Nigeria; Ghana; Sierra Leone; the Gambia.  
3. South-West Africa.  
4. The High Commission Territories.
- Indian Ocean: Seychelles, Mauritius and Aden.
- Mediterranean: Gibraltar, Cyprus and Malta.
- Pacific Ocean: Australia and New Zealand: Fiji, Gilbert and  
Ellice Islands: Tonga, Pitcairn, Nauru,  
New Hebrides, Br. Solomon Islands.
- S.E. Asia: Borneo, Malaya.
- C. Conclusions drawn from a Survey of the Commonwealth.



"The path to sovereign status is not possible  
for all Colonial territories."

It is generally accepted as a necessity that, before a Colonial territory can become a sovereign state, it must first be capable of looking after its own administrative affairs. It is with the ultimate aim of gaining sovereign status in mind that British territories overseas are governed. The chief administrative official is a direct deputy of the Queen. A governor-general's advisory councils consist of prominent native administrators and experienced colonial officers; and both their make-up and indeed their very existence are witness to the fact that the sole objective of the Government of the United Kingdom is to give the territories self-government, which they will attain by a gradual process that cannot be speeded up without disastrous results.

Administrative ability, however, is only one of the factors in the progress of a colonial territory towards sovereign status. The economy of each territory is bound to play a large part in its development too. For if the territory cannot export enough manufactured goods and raw materials to pay for a part at least of its imports, its economic stability will rely on loans made by other Commonwealth territories, on treasury grants, and on a strictly protective tariff. When such a situation arises, it is usually solved to some extent by the cultivation of new cash-crops, and by the setting-up of light industries; the latter to fulfil the dual role of providing some of the goods hitherto imported into the territory, and of increasing the amount of manufactured goods for export.

These two factors have the most influence on the development of British Colonial Territories. Just how they affect each individual territory varies considerably.

Canada is one of the richest territories in the Commonwealth. She has dominion status, and thus stands on a level with the United Kingdom. Her Majesty is Queen of Canada, and it is to the Queen of Canada that Canadians owe their allegiance. Canada is an excellent example of the perfect sovereign state. The population is largely of French and British extraction; with only a small number of the original Indian inhabitants still living within the dominion. Since the population was predominantly European, and therefore already highly-developed politically, there was little delay in attaining dominion status from the administrative point of view; while the mineral wealth of the territory, coupled with the suitability of the South and West for growing wheat, and the vast timber industry of the North, ensured economic stability. Once differences between British and French settlers had been solved, Canada was ready for sovereign status.

Not so, however, Newfoundland. The island did not join the new federation of Canada in 1867, preferring to maintain its traditional independence. But serious maladministration and a weak economy robbed Newfoundland of its former prosperity. The fishing failed for seven successive years; and by the time terms had been arranged between the government of the island and of Canada, the national debt was enormous. This final disastrous chapter in the history of Newfoundland was due to irresponsible government and to the fact that the island's economy was almost entirely dependent on the fisheries. Had Newfoundland had economic stability and political integrity and foresight, the situation would never have arisen.



The Caribbean territories have now become a federation which will hold dominion status. Clearly the islands are too small to attain independence both from each other and from the United Kingdom. Their political institutions are of ancient origins, and the islands are, on the whole, politically stable, though unemployment in Jamaica has been a source of considerable unrest in recent years. There is a certain amount of difficulty in deciding just how much such problems as unemployment and racial distinction will affect the islands once the universal franchise for a Parliamentary Election takes effect. Just as social conditions differ, products from different islands vary considerably, thus giving prosperity and full employment in one area, while another may have little in the way of crops or mineral resources, and a large number of unemployed. Asphalt is exported from Trinidad and sugar from Barbados, as well as spices, cocoa and citrus fruits; while Jamaica is noted for its rum.

It is doubtful whether the two mainland territories of Honduras and Guiana will co-operate with the new federation; but both are underpopulated, though with vast resources, in the case of British Guiana, both mineral and natural. Thus it would benefit them if some of the unemployed from Jamaica and the other islands were to settle in their territories. Even greater mineral wealth could be exploited if the interior could but be opened up.

It is unfortunate that, in British Guiana especially, the strong left-wing People's Progressive Party should be able to find so many causes for stirring up dis-satisfaction. Were the territory to be granted any further degree of self-government, as had originally been planned, the result would almost inevitably be political upheaval.

The demands of the unreasoning and unreasonable Nationalist are a problem wherever they arise, and clearly have a delaying effect on progress.



While British Guiana is an example of a territory that has achieved virtual economic stability without administrative ability sufficient to manage its own affairs peacefully and amicably, the islands of the Atlantic stand as examples of well-organised communities which because of their unbalanced economy are obviously unlikely to become independent. St. Helena, the largest British island in the North Atlantic, is almost self-dependent, and indeed its flax industry flourishes. Ascension Island's only inhabitants are the staff of the Cable and Wireless Station, while, until the Second World War, Tristan da Cunha was occupied only by a few hardy colonists from St. Helena. To a large extent the islands are dependent on grants for development, and clearly it is unlikely that they will become sovereign states. However, their isolation ensures for them virtual independence and self-government without the difficulties of economy and politics.

So far all the examples quoted have been Colonial territories or territories which, having attained sovereign status, have elected to remain as Dominions within the Commonwealth. In recent years, however, some of the territories reaching sovereign status have become independent states, within the Commonwealth or without it. Amongst these are Pakistan, India and Burma, each of which have their own heads of state. India, despite the problems of feeding more people than she can support and of introducing industry into her economy, has won for herself the leadership of the Afro-Asian bloc. She was long a source of wealth to the East India Company, and later the Indian Civil Service became a paragon of efficiency. Thus, in spite of a vast interior and a vast population, the State has a first-class administration, and an extensive network of roads and railways to ease communications.



Burma and Pakistan, however, have not been so fortunate. The former owes considerable unrest to the fact that she is a frontier state with Communist China. Subversive activities have led to the proclamation of martial law, while political corruption has added further chaos to what was already a difficult situation. Administration and communications are rendered even more difficult by the fact that the only access to much of the interior is by the North-South river valleys. Once political troubles have been settled, however, the administration will be able to concentrate on building up the communications system, and making their country independent economically as well as politically.

Pakistan is formed by the Muslim areas in the North-East and North-West of the Indian peninsula. For this reason it has considerable administrative difficulties, since it is divided into two parts, forming separate provinces. Difference in religion makes relations with India extremely hard to maintain on a friendly footing, while the long-standing dispute over Kashmir has involved considerable bloodshed and political strife. Economically, the country is rapidly developing, the irrigation of the Indus Valley being one of the largest schemes in hand at the moment. This, together with industrialisation and the discovery of oil, may help to solve economic problems, while the threatening outlook of further Communist aggression from the North may help to bring India and Pakistan together, thus giving them greater strength to resist a common foe.

In Africa is another example of a colonial territory that has gained both sovereign status and complete independence. The Sudan was originally an Anglo-Egyptian condominium, but has now attained the status of a republic. There are slight difficulties over the division of the population between the Arabs of the North and the native African peoples of the South, but these appear to have been solved. The country's main export is cotton, grown chiefly in the Gezira district. Once an agreement for the increase in size of the Aswan dam has been settled, cultivation of cotton and other crops will be increased enormously. Until then, however, it is restricted to the Nile valley.



To the South of the Sudan lie Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. Kenya and Uganda are both administered as Crown Colonies, the latter being a protectorate, while Tanganyika is a mandated territory. The three have been grouped together for some time, and afford considerable advantages from the union. For Uganda has no seaboard, so her goods travel by railway to ports on the coast. The milder climate of the uplands is ideal for fruit-growing, while the Savannah of the protectorate yields an important crop of cotton. Tanganyika has not yet been fully developed, but there are clearly great possibilities here. The three colonies thus help each other in trade, while their administration is nominally individual. A federation in administration as well as in trade, however, would be less successful. For Uganda and Tanganyika are primarily African-populated territories, Kenya being the most suitable for Europeans and therefore with a larger European minority. A federation would undoubtedly unbalance a rather delicate situation, and in the light of recent events, there might well be a further rebellion. When once the question of the position of the white minority in Kenya has been settled, federation, and with it the path to sovereign status, will be open too. Though Tanganyika is on the verge of independence it is unlikely that the territories will gain joint self-government before this problem has been settled.

The British Somaliland Protectorate is isolated from the other African territories. It was originally occupied, in 1827, to curb piracy. Communications are poor, though roads and railways are making gradual progress. There is very little trade. The colony's position is of strategic value in guarding the straits. There is a possibility that this territory, together with its southern neighbour Somalia, may eventually become a separate native state. The awkward shape of such a territory will put a severe strain on its communications and make it difficult to administer. But both territories could gain considerably from such a union, and doubtless the United Nations would readily grant considerable sums to help development.



While federation would benefit Somaliland, it has been an unfortunate experiment in Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Northern Rhodesia possesses vast mineral wealth, particularly copper, and this has only recently been developed on a large scale. Southern Rhodesia is the state with the largest number of European settlers, and is also the most politically conscious of the three. Nyasaland, however is a much smaller territory, with a very small minority of Europeans. Although the mining industry has helped to solve Nyasaland's unemployment problem, the conditions under which the employees live are dreadful. The federal government is dominated by Europeans, and so the Nyasas are afraid that their progress towards self-government, which had been progressing satisfactorily, will be halted, and that they will not be properly represented in the federal Government. The African National Congress was quick to take advantage of these seeds of dissent, with the result that there were serious disturbances last year. All the African problems that had been amicably settled long ago were cunningly resurrected, while an uglier feature, the Colour Bar, was brought into prominence in this campaign of destruction. As a result, strict precautionary measures were taken. The Assembly was outlawed, and its members either arrested or banned. This brought considerable odium on the Government, but it was a necessity. It would be even better, however, to remove the causes of discontent, and to shelve the federal basis of the territories until all three are prepared and willing to become a Union.

Apart from the Union of South Africa, which is a dominion, there are in this continent the four territories of British West Africa, South-West Africa, and the High Commission territories. The largest of the West African territories, Nigeria, is in the process of achieving dominion status, while Ghana has already gained her sovereignty. Sierra Leone, with its mining concessions, has a serious labour problem on its hands, and with it the difficulties of franchise, should the territory become self-governing. Unruliness



in the mining areas caused disturbances recently, an ill-omen for the future. The Gambia is as yet little developed, though efforts are being made to improve the economy by increasing cultivation - a scheme for rearing poultry was a failure. Should it become a sovereign state, there is the possibility of its joining one of the autonomous states of French West Africa.

The future of South-West Africa is under discussion by the United Nations at this moment, but in view of the Union's apartheid policy, it seems unlikely that the mandates will become a part of South Africa. Union with the Bechuanaland Protectorate would be more desirable, but considerable sums will have to be spent on development schemes before this becomes feasible. Just what will happen to Basutoland and Swaziland is uncertain, as they are merely native protectorates within the Union of South Africa, but under British Control. Clearly they are unlikely to become part of the Union under the present circumstances, and so they will probably have to remain as they are, until such time as a beneficial transfer can be arranged.

The islands of the Indian Ocean, Seychelles and Mauritius, are unlikely to become independent for some time, if at all. Their inhabitants have expressed no desire for self-government, presumably because they are not interfered with very much under the present system, and still benefit from grants and development schemes without the difficulties of complete sovereignty. For strategical reasons, Aden is likely to remain in British hands, since the Colony itself is unable to support itself, and is too small to form a separate political entity anyway, in view of the border disputes with which it and its protectorates are beset. This also applies to Gibraltar, which is an essential naval base in the Mediterranean. That Cyprus is to attain independence is due to the persistent demands of the Greek Orthodox priests and to the campaign of terrorism which they instituted. It is not likely that Malta will achieve independence, however, until she is able to cope with her unemployment problem without the help of British dockyards.



In the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand both attained their sovereignty long ago, and stand as examples of what a British dominion should be. Each now has its own dependencies, which are governed in a similar fashion to our own colonial territories.

The Fiji Islands were ceded voluntarily to the British Crown in 1874. Since that date they have made considerable progress, and may one day form the seat of administration for a Pacific Federation similar to that of the Caribbean Islands. Each Island group would have its own member of parliament to represent it, on the same basis as the House of Commons.

The Gilbert and Ellice Islands are more scattered; the colony also includes Ocean, Christmas, Fanning and Washington Islands. Tonga is an independent native kingdom under British protection, and it is an idyllic South Sea island, with no unemployment or poverty, a model for every island in the Pacific. Pitcairn is self-supporting; and its annual council and magistrate are elected by all over the age of eighteen, an interesting fact when we think of the proposed extension of franchise in the United Kingdom, which was recently in the news. Nauru's importance lies in its abundance of phosphates. The New Hebrides are an Anglo-French Condominium, most of the settlers being of French origin. There has been little development here, and the administration is rather unstable. In the French island of New Caledonia, some such troublemakers have had to be deported.

Further North, in the South-East Asian group, are the British Solomon Islands. The islanders here are not nearly so far advanced as those of the South Pacific. The climate is unsuitable for Europeans, and very few have settled there. Nevertheless, Communist subversive activities have been reported from these islands, and it is clearly time that a real effort was made to develop them. Sarawak and the protectorate of British North Borneo have fared rather better, while the protected sultanate of Brunei has been considerably developed in the search for oil.

The New Federation of Malaya seems to have decided once and for all the future of the Malay peninsula, while Singapore too has achieved self-government. It is to be hoped that Hong Kong will attain a similar status, but the tremendous refugee problem there has yet to be solved.



## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, in nearly every case, the path to sovereign status is open to British Colonial Territories. Through stability in economy and administration, they can and will achieve sovereign status and most of them will do so in the not-too-distant future.

Perhaps one of the greatest problems in the development of a colonial territory is industrialisation. Every territory must industrialise, and this is very often the first step towards achieving a Western standard of civilisation.. Colonialism used to be the adaptation of a group of Europeans to native conditions. Now it has become the adaptation of the natives to a Western way of life. Nowhere are the social troubles of this process more apparent than in Africa to-day. The Victorians were disgusted at the sight of the slums and mining villages that sprang up in our own country. What is happening in Africa to-day is much the same as our own industrial revolution; and opinion in Britain understands it no better than did our great-grandfathers. The majority of people in England cannot understand the situation that has given rise to the policy of racial segregation in the Union of South Africa; nor do they know how it is intended to work. Through the same lack of understanding they will regard any nationalist movement in a British colonial territory as seditious and communist. It is the moderate native political party that suffers most in the metamorphosis of their country from a colony to a self-governing state. They are regarded as pro-European and traitors by their fellow-countrymen, while European former friends treat them with suspicion, because as nationalist leaders they are bound to ask for more power than a colonial administrator is prepared to yield. These are the men who are so often called upon to assist the European in governing a country, because of their moderation and good sense. These are the men upon whom the future of the Commonwealth depends; and as such they deserve our support and not the odium and oblivion to which they are so often consigned.

The path to sovereign status is possible for nearly every British colonial territory. Whether the path will be an easy one, it is not yet possible to visualise.