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Commonwealth

BRITAIN'S role in the nineteenth century was to maintain the balance of power. An even balance of world power is an essential condition of peace. A search for world peace must necessarily include a hunt for a balance of power. In the nineteenth century Britain was concerned with the balance of world power mainly in order to protect and preserve her "empire". Today she has no "empire" to defend. And it reflects the transformation of the "empire" outlook to the Commonwealth concept that the Commonwealth, including Britain, is now more interested in world peace than in its mechanistic manifestation of a balance of power. Not the defence of what remains of Britain's "empire", but the defence of the four freedoms is the basic purpose of the Commonwealth, including Britain. This is the wider background to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, which began its session on the day following the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Even as it is symbolic of the British genius for compromise that in Britain alone among the great democracies Constitutional Monarchy is the "most deeply founded and dearly cherished" institution it is symptomatic of the British Crown and the people's capacity for adaptability that there are Commonwealth countries which are not monarchical, and which do not owe allegiance to the Crown as an institution. It, a Brotherhood of Nations, is a free association of like-minded nations. Not all its members are like-minded. Pakistan has yet to adopt a secular, democratic constitution. Most of its members resent South Africa's policy of racial discrimination. Some of its members have strong mental reservations about Britain's policy in Malaya and in East Africa. Despite these mutual differences and conflicts there is much that is common among its members.

That is why the Commonwealth is a living force today. Tolerance, willingness to agree to disagree, and acceptance of realities are the foundations on which it rests. Abundant reserves, physical vigour to exploit them, and moral stamina to use wealth for welfare are the bases on which its future depends. What Britain has lost in her "empire" she has more than gained in the Commonwealth. Never in British history has she enjoyed the moral prestige and authority which the Commonwealth, including Britain, now commands. Its prime function is to act as a bridge between East and West. It is well-equipped to discharge its world responsibilities. Today the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth meet in the knowledge that the world looks to the Commonwealth to perform the role of a peace-maker. This is at once a challenge and an opportunity to the Commonwealth and its leadership.

Recent developments are encouraging. Since Britain's transfer of power in Asia she has acquired a disinterested outlook on the Far East which enables the Commonwealth, including Britain, to exert its moral influence to further the cause of peace in Korea and the Far East. India can take legitimate pride that she has been instrumental in securing the moral support of the whole Commonwealth for the Korean peace plan. She has been the most vocal in her complaint that America's policy on Korea has not always been consistent with the aims and objectives of

the United Nations. Britain, no longer an Asian Power, has been a willing convert to India's arguments for a more realistic attitude to Korea. Some days before the Commonwealth Premiers were scheduled to meet in London Sir Winston Churchill endorsed the Indian Prime Minister's views on Korea. He admitted that repatriation of war prisoners was no longer an issue in dispute in conceding the eight-point Chinese proposal as a valid basis for discussion.

Washington seemed unimpressed with the consensus of Commonwealth stand on Korea. America put forward a counter-proposal to the Communist formula for the settlement of war prisoners' issue. New Delhi was prompt in letting it be known that this counter-proposal diverged considerably from the United Nations' peace plan for Korea. London endorsed New Delhi's interpretation. It was this common stand by New Delhi and London that induced Washington to revise its proposal in consultation with the member-States directly involved in Korea. This revised formula was blessed by both India and Britain. With reports of the Communist acceptance of this amended UN Command's proposal, an armistice in Korea is now within sight. Through India's initiative and Britain's support, the Commonwealth gained a decisive moral victory. It is a triumph for the United Nations. It is also proof that the Commonwealth, at its best, is capable of creating impressive moral pressure in furtherance of the cause of peace.

Korea is the most active threat to world peace. But there are many other issues in many other parts of the world which are potential threats to world peace. Russia may not be without blame for the "cold war". But it is equally clear that America and her NATO partners cannot absolve themselves of responsibility for continued "cold war". Many members of the Commonwealth have made no secret that they are critical of America's foreign policy. This criticism has grown as Russia's peace gestures since Stalin's death have failed to evoke any response from America. In his Commons speech on May 11, Sir Winston Churchill, took the initiative, on behalf of Britain, in proposing a conference of leading Powers to discuss world issues. This was a diplomatic hint by the British Prime Minister to the Ame-

rican President that Britain, unlike America, considered that the time was opportune for reaching an agreement with Russia.

President Eisenhower could not ignore this hint. But in inviting the British and the French Prime Ministers to meet him at Bermuda the President went out of his way to emphasise that his gesture did not mean that Washington was satisfied with Russia's peaceful intentions. Sir Winston's Commonwealth colleagues have endorsed his call for an East-West Conference. When he goes to Bermuda he will have the full support and backing of the Commonwealth in his efforts to induce America to agree to a discussion of world issues with Russia. Washington will no doubt cite Russia's rejection of the Western Powers' request to resume negotiations on the Austrian Treaty as an instance of Russia's intransigence. President Eisenhower will presumably remind Sir Winston on his assurances to Dr Adenauer in his Commons speech. All the non-NATO members of the Commonwealth will, it may be assumed, suggest to Sir Winston that Britain and her NATO allies must adopt the same realistic attitude to Europe as Britain has been pursuing in Korea and the Far East. Without a settlement of the German problem the Austrian Treaty cannot be signed by Russia. This is one of the main reasons why the Western Powers must meet Russia for negotiations, and not an excuse for rejecting the proposed East-West Conference.

On both the issues of a West-East Conference and of an early peace in Korea the Commonwealth has the initiative. But when the British Prime Minister meets the American President at Bermuda, Mr Eisenhower will probably suggest that Europe and the Far East are not the only regions where peace is threatened. Developments in Middle East, in Malaya, in South, Central, Eastern and Northern Africa are no less threats to peace. Disturbing events in North Africa, and the continued colonial war in Indo-China, are disquieting consequences of France's colonial policy. Egypt and Iran have the tacit support of America in their disputes with Britain. Almost all the Asian members of the Commonwealth, including Britain, resent Dr Malan's policy of racial discrimination in South Africa. In his impression of his recent tour of

Asia and the Middle East, Mr Dulles, the American Secretary of State, has been forthright in his criticism of the policy of the metropolitan Powers. He is not wrong in his basic conclusion that in these regions colonialism, and not Communism, is the immediate threat to peace. There are skeletons in the Commonwealth cupboard. Many of its members will have to adjust their policies to changing times to make its moral influence felt in the world.

All these problems will necessarily have to be discussed by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers to evolve a common policy for world peace. So far its political aspects have been emphasised. But there are economic implications of world peace. It is desirable that the Western Powers reach an agreement with Russia to maintain world peace. But even such an agreement, will not secure peace if its economic foundations are not firmly laid. There can be no lasting peace without prosperity. It is significant that fears of a peace crisis have intensified as the prospects for peace have brightened. More than a year ago the world boom was halted as armistice negotiations started in Korea. Prices have since slumped; unemployment is growing; tailing demand is threatening production. Capitalism faces a grave challenge. It must prove that it can prosper without war demands. There is no reason why industrial democracy should not prosper by diverting its resources from the manufacture of war materials and equipment to production of goods and services for civilian consumption. There are many under-developed areas. There are millions of people whose demands remain unsatisfied. By implementing President Eisenhower's promise of a World Development Fund capitalism can assure its survival, as well as ensure the most essential condition of world peace. This economic aspect of world peace must primarily be the concern of America, the world's richest nation. But the Commonwealth can also play its part in offering its co-operation to America in order to induce her to enable her economic responsibilities to the world with confidence.