

COMMONWEALTH UNION

"The British Empire is not founded on negations
It depends essentially, if not formally, on positive ideals
Free institutions are its life-blood
Free co-operation is its instrument
Peace, security and progress are among its objects."
—Balfour Committee Report, 1926.

The Commonwealth and Empire Today

The whole structure of the British Commonwealth and Empire is gravely menaced by the two great crises of the post-war world—the dollar crisis and the cold war.

Britain's material position has been so adversely affected by the costs of the war that there is even some doubt as to whether she will long be able to retain her position as a great power alongside of the United States. The fortunes of the United Kingdom have been so altered that she is no longer the directing head of a great commonwealth and empire, but only the sentimental heart of a loosely-grouped body of independent nations.

Great Britain's inability to retain a world-wide position as a great power has led to the operation of centrifugal forces on the Commonwealth and Empire. Canada, for instance, which has long relied on the British Navy for its security, now places its faith for protection from external aggression on the Atlantic Pact. The drift of Newfoundland away from the centre was so evident that the people of that island chose to unite with Canada rather than to seek the solution of responsible government or union with the United States. India provides another example of the disintegration of the Commonwealth and Empire in that she is only bound to our brotherhood of nations by the lightest of links. Unless some arrangement is made to provide adequate protection to Australia, New Zealand and India, through a Commonwealth system, these nations will be forced to seek the protection of a Pacific Pact led by the United States.

The Nature of Our Crisis

Thus, throughout the world, the Commonwealth and Empire is in crisis. It is a two-sided crisis. The danger of this crisis is that the Commonwealth will dissolve and pass away. The cold war and the dollar crisis forcing, as it does, the solidification of blocs, may place the Commonwealth and Empire under the domination of the United States. If the present decentralization trend of the Commonwealth continues, the Americans will become the residuary heirs of the Commonwealth power and leadership; the Commonwealth can pass away and become a sentimental memory.

The Commonwealth in crisis provides a great opportunity for the Commonwealth peoples all over the world. If the loyalty, tradition and self-interest of the Commonwealth peoples is strong enough to build a Commonwealth Union upon the present crisis then the power, prestige and moral force of our free Commonwealth can be preserved to benefit all mankind.

The Commonwealth today may be likened to an ancient automobile which has become loose in all its parts and which is in danger of flying apart. If the automobile is to be preserved the mechanics must be called in to tighten the body. Similarly, to save the Commonwealth the whole structure must be tightened.

Periodic conferences of Commonwealth prime ministers are of little use to a Commonwealth in crisis. A Commonwealth Union is needed to cope with the tremendous problems of our time. Such a union provides the basis for the only kind of bloc which could preserve a global balance of power and, at the same time, give moral leadership to the small powers of the world.

Canada and Commonwealth Union

Until 1945, Canada's external policy was based on the Laurier-Borden-King philosophy of "no commitments." The country has eschewed close entanglements with the United States and with the Pan-American Union. On the other side, in order to keep the ship of state on an even keel, the country refused to make any long-term commitments within the British Commonwealth and Empire. This successful policy has brought Canada to its greatest development. We are now an independent middle power.

Since the ending of the war this policy has been fundamentally altered. Today, Canada is relying more heavily and more exclusively on the American military machine than at any time in its history. Moreover, Canadian economic, political and moral welfare is now almost entirely dependent on the American industrial machine. This is a most unhealthy position for Canada. This Dominion can play its greatest role in world economic and political affairs not as a junior partner of the United States but as a senior member of the world-wide Commonwealth Community. In order to balance off our heavy entanglements with the United States we should also enter into binding arrangements with the other nations of the British Commonwealth.

The signatory nations of the Atlantic Pact are held together primarily by fear of Russian aggression. The Commonwealth system has never been directed against any nation, but has been bound together by a common love of democratic institutions. Surely this is a solid basis to build a Commonwealth Union upon.

Canada has great moral and material power. Her destiny and her duty lays upon Canada a moral obligation to use her power for the good of mankind. By using her influence in world affairs as conscience directs Canada can increase her moral and material stature. Dependence on Washington for shaping of Canadian foreign policy would mean the lowering of Canada's status. In fact it would be a new form of isolationism where Canada blindly followed the dictates of the American Government without originating or following through on her own foreign policy.

Canada can best perform her part in world affairs by working through a United Commonwealth. If Canada relies exclusively on her position as a North American power as the source of her strength her power will be dependent on the United States; her role in world affairs would not be separable from that of the United States. The danger of that policy is that our independence and power would be sapped, and in time Canada could occupy a position of subservience *viz à viz* the United States like of the South American republics.

The task of Canadian statesmanship is to seek close co-operation with the United States but, at the same time, to ward off domination or absorption by the United States. The technique of maintaining our independence and of increasing our position is to be found in union with other Commonwealth countries.

What Is Commonwealth Union?

Commonwealth Union does not mean a federal union. Nor does it mean a legislative union. Neither would be practical or feasible. There is a social gap between, say, the Indian peoples and the Canadian people that may not be bridged within our life-time.

Commonwealth Union, then, is more akin to an administrative union of governments than to a union of states or peoples.

The first common problem that could be handled by Commonwealth Union is defence. A Commonwealth Defence Board would be the agency charged with integrating and co-ordinating all of the armed forces of the Empire and Commonwealth. Standardization of weapons, etc., would be one of the first problems to come before the Board. The basis of standardization would be the Commonwealth and Empire but the scheme would necessarily be linked to American production of war material. Production of weapons of war by Commonwealth countries would be subject to the central plan drawn up by the Board. Training of personnel could well be a matter for the agenda of the Defence Board.

A Commonwealth Finance and Production Board could act as a clearing house on information for the Commonwealth and Empire in the related matters of finance and production. This Board might be charged with reviewing the whole tariff structure of Commonwealth nations. In respect to tariffs, Canada is in a special position. In all probability, Canada would be unable to join any such economic bloc as a Commonwealth Customs Union. However, since Canada is a creditor with respect to all of the Commonwealth countries, Canada might well consider a general preferential lowering of tariff on Commonwealth imports.

A Commonwealth Migration Board could be set up to deal with population transfers between Commonwealth and Empire countries.

A Commonwealth Court should be utilized to adjudicate disputes between member-nations. A Commonwealth Court of Human Rights might also be valuable.

Commonwealth cultural agencies could serve a useful purpose in promoting the exchange of information and knowledge between members of the Commonwealth.

The administration of the colonial empire provides a special problem for the Commonwealth and Empire. The administration of the colonies by Whitehall need not be disturbed but there is a need for financial assistance by countries like Canada in the economic development of the colonies. If Canada is to give this assistance the Canadian Government should be represented in the administration which governs the colonies.

The boards which have been proposed hereinbefore should be composed of cabinet ministers representing the various Commonwealth countries. Thus, the boards would only possess delegated powers. Actions and policies of the boards would be subject to the ratification of the member states. Under the jurisdiction of the boards and on the technical level permanent sub-committees and a Commonwealth secretariat will be necessary.

The American Attitude

The American Government and people have underwritten Western Union. During the last war the United States guaranteed the survival of the British Commonwealth and Empire. There is no reason to suppose that American public opinion would oppose Commonwealth Union. Indeed, the United States might welcome and support Commonwealth Union with the consequent closer grouping of the democratic nations of the world.

The cardinal fact that we face today is this: Unless the Commonwealth and Empire is united, the whole system may pass away. The centrifugal and disintegrating forces now operating on the Commonwealth and Empire give us every reason to conclude that the Commonwealth and Empire has no divine mandate to exist.

*"Before my breath, like blazing flax,
Man and his marvels pass away;
And changing empires wane and wax,
Are founded, flourish and decay."*

("The Antiquary": Scott).

To survive the Commonwealth and Empire needs the moral food supplied to men's minds only by closer union; sentimental claptrap is no nourishment.

Non enim ignavia magna imperia continari: For great empires are not maintained by cowardice.

(Tacitus: Annals, Book 15, 1).

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DEBATING COMMITTEE

On November 28th and 29th representatives from eleven Maritime Universities met in Halifax where Dalhousie University played host to the annual Maritime Intercollegiate Debating League (M. I. D. L.) Conference. The conference this year resulted in a lot of very important work being accomplished by the various representatives. The regular M. I. D. L. schedule which provides for each member University having three official debates was drawn up, with the Law School drawing debates with Saint Dunstan's, Kings and Mount Allison Universities. A few important changes were made in the M. I. D. L. constitution during the course of the conference and on the whole the various delegates returned home with the gratifying feeling of having accomplished a good deal of work. A word here is in order to express our sincere appreciation to Dalhousie for having made our stay there a very pleasant one and for the capable manner in which the conference was conducted. Representatives from the Law School were, J. Eric Young and Ervin M. O'Brien.

It is interesting to note how we as an individual University fit into the national structure. Before the establishment of C. U. D. A. in 1947 the national aspect of debating was guided