In this last week representatives of 800 million people have sat in the House of Representatives. It has been an historic occasion for Australia.

On Monday His Excellency the Governor-General opened the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference. The ceremony was held in the House of Representatives. Since little is known of this Association I thought it might be a good idea to say something about it.

There are thirty-four countries represented by the C.P.A. They are all countries which were once in the British Empire and which are now part of the Commonwealth of Nations which has grown out of the British Empire. People of every colour, race and creed belong to the Association. All the Dominions of the Commonwealth are members, in addition to many small islands and countries which have a certain measure of self-government, but over whom Britain still wields some authority. Two countries that come to mind in this category are the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which covers a large area of Africa, and then again the country of Bermuda. Sir John Cox, the delegate from Bermuda, in replying to the welcome to Australia by the Prime Minister, said that although Bermuda did not have full Dominion status it has as much self-government as it wanted, for the simple reason that it was a tiny country and could never stand completely on its own feet.

Therefore, just because many of the representatives of these Commonwealth countries do not have complete and full self-government it does not necessarily mean that they all want to be completely independent of Britain.

Cases of this kind are, of course, in exception to the general policy of giving full self-government to all the former colonies when the time is suitable.

This is only the second time that the Association has met in Australia. It is unlikely that it will come to Australia again in the lifetime of many members of the present House of Representatives. This is because the Commonwealth now has so many free and independent countries in it, and they wish to be given the honour and privilege of being the host nation in turn. There are thirty-four countries concerned, and the Conference only meets every second year. Therefore, in the normal course of events,
it will take 66 years to get back to Australia.

The C.P.A. does not make laws; it cannot be binding on any government. Representatives who come to the Conference cannot take home orders that they must do this or they must do that. However, the value of the Conference lies in the free interchange of ideas between people of different countries. It does not matter if countries within the Commonwealth have different points of view so long as we can understand and respect the point of view of the other countries. As one delegate put it this morning, to understand the other point of view is very often as useful as to agree. It would be quite hopeless to expect all members of the Commonwealth to have the same point of view on many of the problems confronting the world. At times we, in Australia, have severe differences of opinion on domestic and foreign policy and we all come from very much the same background. How much more impossible then to expect the members of the Commonwealth -- the people from India, Ghana, Malaya, from Nigeria or Jamaica -- to have the same points of view.

In this coming week the Conference will discuss many problems, the most important of which will be economic co-operation within the Commonwealth and the problems of undeveloped territories of the Commonwealth. In addition, the Conference will devote considerable time to international affairs and defence.

I will write again on some of these matters, but the important thing to remember about the C.P.A. is that it sets an example to the world. Probably every race and every religion found in the world is found somewhere inside this great Commonwealth. If the members of the Commonwealth can, by their example, show that they can get along with each other and help each other, then we have some hope for a more secure future.

In the colonial days when many of these countries were ruled by the British Colonial Office ties to the then Empire were obvious and direct. Now these direct ties have been cut but these countries, some of whom had their origins in slavery, are all strong supporters of the Commonwealth. They are joined by no act of law, by no threat of force, but by the firm belief that the Commonwealth stands for justice and Democracy. If I may quote from the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Evatt, who put it this way "We want peace but demand liberty".
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