PRESS STATEMENT

MALCOLM FRASER

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Conference ended last Saturday. A great part of the discussions concerned the joint problems of economic co-operation within the Commonwealth and the difficulties of development in the underdeveloped countries.

The Australian Treasurer, Mr. Holt, opened the debate on economic co-operation within the Commonwealth by outlining the capital resources that were available throughout the world and by saying how extremely heavy were the demands on these relatively limited resources. The whole world is crying out for expansion and development; even countries that are highly developed like the United Kingdom find themselves forced to spend vast sums of money on the development of new processes and the expansion of atomic power for peaceful purposes. This, of course, tends to lessen the funds that may be available for investment in other countries. Australia itself, which is pursuing vigorous developmental programs, would probably be able to do more at any given time if greater capital resources were available to us on a permanent and assured basis. However, even though there are limits to what can be done, notable progress can and has been made within the Commonwealth countries.

A suggestion was made during the debate for a Commonwealth Development Bank; a Bank to which all members would subscribe in proportion to their own resources and which would then make loans available to the under-developed members of the Commonwealth. This is a sound idea and one that is worthy of support. It was originally put forward two or three years ago. However, this idea may not come to fruition because the United States has sponsored the formation of what will be called an International Development Association. This would have the same functions and purposes as the proposed Commonwealth Development Bank, but it would not be restricted to members of the Commonwealth. If the international organisation can be brought into being it would probably be unwise for the Commonwealth to pursue its own plans.

This is an example of how the Commonwealth can give a lead to all the countries of the world because I think it quite probable that the International Development Association would never have been suggested and would not come to fruition if the Commonwealth had not, at an earlier stage, suggested the Commonwealth Development Bank.
Members of the Commonwealth from some African and Asian countries drew the attention of the Conference to the difficulties that can be caused when policies in one country do damage to another within the Commonwealth. I can give an example of this in this way. We, in Australia, are trying to build up our own strength, and as far as possible we wish to make ourselves self-sufficient. If, in doing this, we find that we are producing things which we used to import from other Commonwealth countries, then we may do grave damage to those countries. This is important because many of these countries live almost entirely on the export of one, two or three commodities. It may be rubber and tin, as in the case of Malaya; it may be tea, cocoa or copra as in the case of other countries within the Commonwealth. If we, and other more advanced countries, make ourselves self-sufficient in some of these tropical and semi-tropical products, then the damage to these other smaller countries of the Commonwealth can be great. This is a problem which obviously must be watched in relation to the development of any individual member of the Commonwealth, and I would say quite categorically that the stronger members of the Commonwealth have an obligation in this matter to the less developed countries.

In the question of economic co-operation and development, I only want to quote one more fact to drive home the difficulty that many countries are facing. India is a country with a rapidly increasing population, confronted by immense difficulties and great poverty. She is making many sacrifices to build up the basic development of the country. You will realise how difficult is her task when I say that her national income is twice that of Australia, but her population is forty times as great.

During these debates, which were all held in the House of Representatives, we had the unusual and rare spectacle of the Australian Prime Minister being followed by an ex-Prime Minister of Great Britain, Earl Attlee, then being followed by the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Evatt—all from the same side of the House.

In its final stages the Conference carried a decision to hold its meetings each year instead of every second year. This is a sound step and one which can be regarded as a measure of the benefit and value which all those that participated placed in this Conference. It is quite certain that all the delegates to this country left Australia with a
better understanding and regard for our own problems, difficulties and policies, and we, in return, have been given some conception of the immense difficulties confronting other members of the Commonwealth. As the Conference will be held in future years in other Commonwealth countries so will our understanding and knowledge of these problems increase.
Library Digitised Collections

Author/s:
Fraser, Malcolm

Title:
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Debate

Date:
8 November 1959

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/40403

File Description:
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Debate

Terms and Conditions:
Copyright courtesy of Malcolm Fraser. Contact the University of Melbourne Archives for permission requests.