

*The Australian Institute*  
OF  
*International Affairs*



“THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OF  
NATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL  
AFFAIRS”

by

The Rt. Hon. R. G. MENZIES

*Roy Milne Memorial Lecture*  
*Adelaide*

*June 26th, 1950*

## "THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS."

To deal adequately with this tremendous subject is a task alike beyond my powers and your patience. What I propose to do, therefore, is to select a few important questions and to offer some answers to them. In both question and answer I will speak for myself, and perhaps for many others. I am not here to make some party pronouncement; nor will I attempt to deal with certain current matters which are in the trusted hands of my colleague, the Minister for External Affairs. But it may be of value to expose to you my own basic ideas, not as briefly as either you or I would desire, but at any rate as clearly as possible.

### WHAT IS THE PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS?

It is not useful to discuss the merits or otherwise of the Constitutional Declaration made by the Prime Ministers in 1948, a declaration having particular reference to the position of India, and by which the Republic of India was recognised as a member of a Commonwealth in which the King was "the head."

Such discussions may be fruitful for the historian, and are not without interest to the constitutional theorist, but when they are retrospective they can contribute little to the work of statesmanship.

But at least we should not do as we so frequently do—look the other way and pretend that nothing has happened. Our celebrated British hostility to deductive logic has its uses. We have, unlike some Continental peoples, much preferred to establish our general principles inductively, that is, by taking one practical step at a time until the pattern of our action becomes clear.

It is vastly important that we should understand this characteristic, which is to be seen clearly in the development of the

English common law and in the development of Parliamentary responsible government. It is because of our instinctively inductive approach that we have resisted in large measure the codification of the law.

The Continental mind runs much more easily to the deductive process; it is disposed to fit events into a pre-determined pattern; it has a feeling for codification. It is, if I may engage in an aside, one of my own personal anxieties that in the course of this century we have ourselves become more and more involved in a series of highly-complicated and elaborate paper arrangements which cut right across the habits of our own minds and indeed the genius of our own history.

If it were not for the inductive character of our minds there would have been no Empire and certainly no British Commonwealth, for each was a growth from precedent to precedent and in no sense represented a logical conclusion from fixed premisses.

Still in spite of all this it is a good thing that every now and then we should look at the pattern so that we may at least realise how far we have gone.

There was a time—and only a few years ago—when His Majesty the King presided over an Empire which included the British Commonwealth (the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa), the Empire of India, and an extensive colonial Empire, together with Eire in a transitional stage. This Empire had racial diversity but structural unity under the Crown. The King—one King—was the head of each State for all purposes, external or internal. The British Empire could as recently at 1944 be described by both Lord Halifax and General Smuts as one of the four "great powers." This, I have always thought, represented a sound interpretation of the famous Balfour formula of 1926 which described the Dominions as "autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs though united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."

Three of the phrases in this celebrated statement are occasionally forgotten. They are:—

“within the British Empire”;  
“a common allegiance to the Crown”; and  
“*British Commonwealth of Nations.*”

ter all, though the phrase “British Commonwealth” has come to widespread use, it was, as we see, declared in 1926 to be a Commonwealth within an Empire. The formula thus made it clear that in spite of the legal independence of the major portions of the structure, it was still a structure possessing an internal character and that whatever diversity existed was not inconsistent with the unity of the whole for major international purposes.

But great changes have occurred.

There are some enviable people to whom a formula represents finality. But the truth is that for better or for worse (and I will raise no controversy about it) the old structural unity of the Empire has gone. It has been succeeded by structural variety. It may, if the process goes on, give place to a merely functional association based upon friendship and common interest but necessarily lacking the old high instincts and instantaneous cohesion which sprang from the fact that we were, all over the British world, as indeed we remain in the old dominions, the King's subjects and the King's men. The King in relation to the Republic of India, no longer possessed of external juristic significance. As the citizens of India now enter upon Republican self-government with a President and under the Parliamentary leadership of their own distinguished statesman, Pandit Nehru, they are for all internal purposes severed from allegiance to the Crown. There is no King *in* India. But for purposes of external association India remains a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations of which the King is, since the 1948 decision, declared to be “the head.”

We may compare the position of Pakistan where the King is still represented by a Governor-General and is still through him the head of the Government.

Come nearer home to Australia. With us the King is not merely the symbol and head of an external association but is himself a real presence in our local self-government. The Governor-General is his personal representative. The King makes our statutes by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Representatives. I am His Majesty's Australian Prime Minister. Mr. Chifley is His Majesty's Leader of

the Opposition. The courts are the King's courts and it is the King's writ which issues from them. We have an appeal to His Majesty in Council from certain decisions of our own courts. Our National Anthem is still (peace to the broadcasters) "God Save The King." Every Member of Parliament takes the Oath of Allegiance. We are royal, not republican; British, wherever we may be.

Here then we have a new diversity indeed. Our Australian relationship to the United Kingdom, to Canada, to New Zealand, to most of the British Commonwealth countries, is structural or organic. The key-stone of the structure is a common allegiance to a common King. The relationship of India to the United Kingdom is in large measure functional; an operative friendship based upon powerful elements, sincerely valued by the Indian people, but not identical with our own.

Doubtless this development which I have sought to describe was inevitable. It is the duty of those of us who help to guide public thinking not to spend our days in vain regrets, but to do all we can to preserve the many good things that are left and carefully nurture those new associations which can and must be of such service to the world.

#### HAS THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH BEEN OUT-MODED BY THE UNITED NATIONS?

In considering whether our sincere support for the United Nations, its Charter and its agencies, renders the British Commonwealth association less significant, it is as well to look back for a moment.

At the end of the first world war the League of Nations was devised as a means for keeping the peace. It failed. There were many reasons for this, which time will not permit me to discuss. One, however, was so important as to deserve special mention. Whenever the strain came on, as in the case of Abyssinia, the League of Nations failed because, though its paper obligations were vast, its resources were practically non-existent. The League failed, not because it tried to do too little but because it tried to do too much. It was established upon the basis of contract between independent sovereignties. But the truth is that the only effectiveness which an international contract possesses is either that which arises from the goodwill or

sense of honest obligation of the contracting parties, or that which can be physically enforced. And the means of physical enforcement are to be found only in the strength of those parties against whose will the contract has been broken.

I believe that it is clear that in the few years before the second war an almost fatal illusion about the strength of the League of Nations was permeating the democratic mind. At the same time the so-called intellectuals of the world began to insert into the heads of too many people an utterly false dichotomy. "Are you for power politics?" they said, "Or are you for collective security?" When some realistic person spoke up for armaments behind the Covenant he was promptly told that the talk must be of disarmament, and that those who spoke otherwise were mere war-mongers. Yet the truth was that an unarmed League of Nations was not only impotent against but also an invitation to an armed aggressor.

Once again, at the end of the second world war, there was and is a powerful world feeling against its repetition and an earnest desire to find some effective instrument of peace. An attempt to forge such an instrument was made at San Francisco. Remembering the powerlessness of the League of Nations in grave affairs, the draftsman at San Francisco determined that in the new Charter the United Nations should, as one advocate said, be given "teeth." Accordingly they inserted Article 43 of the Charter, under which all members of the United Nations undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces and other facilities for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security. The agreement or agreements are to govern the numbers and types of forces, their degree of readiness and general location, and the nature of the facilities to be provided. This scheme, it will be seen, amounts to no more than a "contract to make a contract," and in fact no steps have yet been taken under it. It remains to be seen whether member nations will in fact stand up to this potential obligation if the circumstances at any given moment render it politically unpalatable. The real difficulty about a provision of this kind, to give armed force to the United Nations, is that the membership is so extensive, and the obligations which may be incurred can therefore vary so greatly in both time and place, that it will be in very many instances difficult or even impos-

sible to arouse effective national support for the international action planned. It is quite true that, with a clear realisation of this defect, the Western European powers and the United States of America have more recently put forward great efforts and shown both imagination and realism by formulating the Atlantic Pact and arranging defensive co-operation in Western Europe. But, though such arrangements are usually, for the sake of conformity, described as "regional arrangements within the structure of the Charter," they can be much more accurately described as groupings of power by a limited number of nations for mutual defensive purposes.

In brief, they are not in any real sense built upon the foundation of the Charter, but are a recognition of the inadequacy of the machinery provided by the Charter.

Let me turn to another aspect of this vitally important problem.

It is conceded, even by those who are most willing to claim that the Security Council has great achievements to its credit, that it has been heavily crippled by the existence and misuse of the veto; that is, the provision in Article 27 of the Charter which says that decisions of the Security Council on non-procedural matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of seven members, including the concurring votes of the permanent members—one of which is, of course, the Soviet Union. But I feel strongly that, while there is no doubt that this veto power has been abused, it is a blunder to think of this abuse as something which is merely related to an Article in the Charter or which could be simply remedied by an alteration in the language of the Charter. If there were no veto provision in the Charter at all, there would still be one in fact.

Let us suppose that the Security Council met, with a plain provision for a majority decision, whatever the subject might be. And let us suppose that, upon a matter of grave international importance which might lead to war, most of the members of the Security Council were inclined to make a decision and to authorise or institute measures of enforcement in support of it. Would they be disposed to carry the matter to a vote and therefore to action if, say, the Soviet Union were in opposition?

Or take another case:

Let us assume that the important matter involved a majority decision by the Security Council that one of the great powers was guilty of an act of aggression or of a grave breach of international law. Would the Security Council, even if free to do so, make a majority decision and set about enforcing it against that great power?

If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, then it represents a notable advance. But at the same time it must be pointed out that under such circumstances the forces to be employed would be the national forces of the great powers concerned, and not the international force of the United Nations, for no such force is as yet available—or even in distant sight.

I find it very difficult to believe that the great powers (and, after all, the small ones have little to say to this question of enforcement) are as yet within measurable distance of entering into an arrangement under which any one of them may be declared at fault by the others and forced into a course of action contrary to its own will.

This of course is basically the reason why the great powers insisted upon the veto provisions as a condition of their participating in the Charter.

We will do better to think of the veto problem as evidence of the continued existence of a strong nationalist state of mind than as some defect in a written document.

One authoritative statement has been made "that Australia was prepared to accept the veto in respect of enforcement action, but could see no reason whatever why it should be applied in respect of the peaceful settlement of disputes."

This is an extremely significant statement, because the acceptance of the veto in respect of enforcement action (an acceptance which is, I entirely agree, in line with what we may call the real facts of international life) means two things.

In the first place, it means that no great power, that is, no permanent member of the Security Council, can be restrained from aggression by the United Nations, because no decision in relation to that aggression will ever be given by the Security Council at all.

This means that the force some day to be placed at the disposal of the Security Council under the Article to which I have referred need not be a great one, for a great "police force"



would be needed only to restrain a great power, and the restraint of the great power is, *ex hypothesi*, not within the jurisdiction of the United Nations at all.

In the second place, it means, by inevitable consequence, that aggressive action by a great power must, if it is to be restrained at all, be restrained by some other great power or powers *acting not under the Charter but independent of it*. This, of course, involves the conclusion that the great powers will and must continue to maintain armed forces of a purely national character and for purely national purposes.

It may be that the day will come when all the nations of the world, meeting in a General Assembly of the United Nations, will elect and control a Security Council as an executive; will act upon the decisions of that Council; will accept a body of international law with that substantial obedience which we now accord to the law in our own lands; will have alleged breaches of that law adjudicated upon by the permanent Court; and will treat as commonplace the enforcement of the Court's decision by the international policeman.

In that state of the world, aggressive and independent nationalism will have come to an end; national sovereignties will have subsided into world citizenships; and national groupings of whatever kind will be both antiquated and irrelevant.

But that day is not yet, nor, if we are to be frank with ourselves, can we pretend that we even see it approaching.

It can be said with confidence that in the last two years we have seen nationalistic movements come into powerful development in many countries which were previously content to be dependent or controlled.

Thus, in the brief period that has elapsed since the cessation of fighting we have seen India and Pakistan come into independent existence, with a great and at times violent upsurge of national and racial feeling; we have seen a similar development in Burma; we in Australia have been the not very neutral witnesses of a similar movement conducted for the formation of an Indonesian Republic. All over the world there is a stirring among races and peoples.

So far from that stirring representing an agitation to create an international state, to reduce national sovereignty, and to accept the authority of international bodies, it has repre-

sented nothing so much as an old-fashioned—though newly expressed—determination to insist upon the prerogative of each race and community to govern its own affairs and, where necessary, to throw off the yoke of the foreigner.

These unquestionable facts are no very happy augury for the oncoming of the international era.

Let us now turn to consider whether the United Nations, representing a lofty idealism on the part of many of its creators, but handicapped and limited as it is by the other matters to which I have referred, reduces in any way the urgent importance of the British Empire to British people.

Perhaps it will aid clarity of thought and expression on this urgent matter if I set out what appear to me to be three convincing reasons why the British Empire must remain our chief international preoccupation:

- (1) I have already discussed the vexed question of the veto on the Security Council and of the striking limitation which it imposes upon either the need or the capacity of the United Nations to maintain substantial international military forces.

The stark result of these considerations can be set down in a few sentences.

History has shown that great wars which threaten mankind are wars which involve great powers. If a great power is once again to assume the role of aggressor, an international law-breaker, resistance to that power must be provided by the strength of some other great power or powers.

As that resistance cannot, by reason of the Charter, be organised or controlled by the Security Council, it must be organised or controlled *outside the Council*. In other words, the matter must go as though there were no United Nations at all. This being so, a strong, well-knit and well-armed British Empire is just as essential to-day as far-seeing men believed it was in 1938.

- (2) The San Francisco Conference deliberately separated the United Nations from the Peace Settlements necessary to liquidate the world war.

If I may quote Dr. Evatt's words:—

"It was never intended that the United Nations should be charged with the responsibility for negotiating and concluding Peace Settlements with Germany, Austria, Japan, Italy, or the allied German satellites . . . . The Charter was designed to create an international organisation which could maintain peace in the future; not an organisation to finish off the war or to make the Peace Settlements."

This enormously important consideration has been tragically overlooked, not only by some extravagant critics of the United Nations, but also by most of its more extravagant champions. There has been a widespread disposition to say that the United Nations has failed because both in Europe and in East Asia the just settlement of the problems of Germany and of Japan has not yet really been approached.

I point out that while there are grave defects in the United Nations' conception and structure, the blame for the state of affairs in Europe and in East Asia cannot properly be attached to it.

The extravagant friends of the United Nations have themselves contributed to this misapprehension by their single-minded attempts to concentrate public interest upon the doings of the United Nations as if it were the one instrument for the pacification of the world and as if we therefore owed to it our first thought and presumably our first loyalty.

The simple truth is that if the Peace Settlements are not the function of the United Nations, those Settlements must be negotiated and achieved *outside the United Nations*. This in turn means that the Settlement of Europe and the Settlement of Japan must be a matter between the victorious belligerents on the one hand (*all* of them, not some of them!) and the defeated powers on the other.

Once we rid our minds of the rather confused notion that the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations has something to do with the re-settlement of Europe and of East Asia, we will see much more vividly the elementary truth that, to take

the settlement of Europe as an example, that settlement cannot be achieved with either the speed or justice which it merits unless both the United States and the British Empire are able to go into the negotiations with the maximum of strength and authority.

It is useless to think that we solve problems by ignoring them. If the British Empire is to be regarded merely as a series of separate even if respectable fragments, then inevitably the settlement of Europe will tend to become a contest between the Soviet Union on the one hand and the United States on the other, with the European powers little more than pawns in the game, and with Great Britain acting more or less precariously as an intermediary.

But if the British Empire in truth acts as a great power, then it can not only alter the character of the contest, but it can make an immense contribution to European peace.

It is, I believe, essential to the welfare of Europe and therefore of mankind that the British Empire voice in the European Settlement should be both strong and clear. For if the United Kingdom is to speak only for itself, if it is to go to the conference table weakened to that extent, absorbed by the domestic problems of its own economic crisis, it will suffer inevitably from what Kipling called "the webbed and inward-turning eye," and what should be a settlement will tend to become an old-fashioned bilateral contest between the Communist autocracy of Russia and the democratic Capitalism of the United States.

I would not be thought to deprecate in any way the immense interest and the crucial importance of the United States in these matters. That amazing country has twice in our lifetimes come to the rescue of freedom in Europe and therefore has, in relation to Europe, a vital interest and a noble mission. But she is not a European country in the sense that France is, or in the sense that the United Kingdom is. Britain, steeped in European history and politics, wise and experienced over the centuries, can contribute, as perhaps no other power can, to a just settlement.

Indeed, it seems unlikely that there will be a good and lasting European settlement without a vital and powerful contribution from her. If that contribution is to be made, it is quite clear that there must be the maximum integration of Empire effort, so that not only may her internal economic problems be relieved but her strength in the Council Chamber undoubted.

Politics, whether international or national, is an intensely practical business.

We should constantly remind ourselves of Burke's celebrated dictum that we need "to model our principles to our duties and our situation; to be fully persuaded that all virtue which is impracticable is spurious."

And practical politics, I dare assert, is concerned with the problem of how to cope with the next ten or twenty years so strongly and wisely that there will be a real foundation of peace upon which a genuine international organisation can be built.

I return to my earlier statement that a false dichotomy has been set up between collective security and power politics. The truth is that in relation to the making of the Peace Settlements, power politics will be just as necessary as it was for the winning of the war. If we understand it aright we will realise that so far from being an element hostile to the United Nations, it may turn out to be the most effective guarantee of the true interests of that infant body.

- (3) To concentrate completely upon the affairs of the United Nations to the exclusion of those other urgent interests which we have in the British Empire may well lead us to regard ourselves in our various parts of the Empire as quite separate. The moment we do this, the moment we accustom ourselves to that complete independence of action which appears to be postulated by the United Nations structure, we will more and more find ourselves afraid of acting as an Empire group for fear of provoking other groups and so rendering the United Nations unworkable.

After all, if we are to be told that such national groupings are inconsistent with the United Nations, our choice becomes the grim one of abandoning those national groupings or of abandoning the United Nations. If this be really the choice, then British people can have little doubt as to how they will resolve it—unless they are really existing in that strange ecstasy of illusion in which they are prepared to drop the substance for the shadow.

A splendid illustration of this matter can be found in the present position in Malaya, where the British Government and Forces are seeking to deal with a species of insurrection which is not Nationalist but Communist and draws its inspiration and direction from Chinese Communism. Australia has decided, as you know, to render certain Air Force assistance. Now, if it were a foreign power which held Malaya, would we assist? Our interest would in one respect be identical, for Malaya and Singapore lie across the path of Communist expansion in South-East Asia whether they are British or not. Yet everybody will concede that what would have been a difficult and epoch-making decision if Malaya were non-British was, in the present circumstances, regarded universally in Australia as not only right but inevitable.

In all these considerations we can perceive a clear warning based upon the most practical of considerations, that we must not allow either the existence or the particular structure of the United Nations to run counter to our basic need, never greater than it is to-day, for a strong, well-knit and mutually supporting British Empire.

#### IS A CONCERTED BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY POSSIBLE?

This question cannot be answered with any satisfaction as we clear our minds on the problem of what are the facts of a foreign policy.

I will not attempt an exhaustive answer, but I would without hesitation say that the business of foreign policy cer-

tainly includes making and cultivating international friendships, avoiding war without sacrificing vital principles, and last but not least, taking every possible step to see that, if war should come, we enter it with powerful friends and with some reasonable human assurance of victory. It is indeed, almost an academic question to ask whether on great matters the countries of the British Empire should have a common policy. The simple military truth is that there can be no security for the democratic world unless not only all the British countries, but also the United States of America and the nations of Western Europe are at one in their defensive arrangements and in the policies to which those arrangements give expression. In other words, my proposition is not that it is desirable to have common policies, but that it is vital to have them.

It is true that we should distinguish between those policies which affect all the world and those which are purely regional in their character. For example, I should be the last to deny, since my own Government has affirmed it, that Australia has a perfect right to announce its views on the future of New Guinea and to back those views by all rational means within its power. This is in no sense inconsistent with our belief that in relation to great world issues we are a part of the British family and believe that we must all act as members of that family.

Again, we in Australia have particular interests in South East Asia and in the South West Pacific, and upon these our views are bound to be strongly held and are entitled to be vigorously expressed. But nobody need assume from these facts that we are cutting ourselves adrift from the main currents of world affairs, or that we regard ourselves as uninfluenced by them.

In the big matters we are, and must be, and are proud to be, intimately associated with Great Britain, with our sister Dominions, with the United States and with the democratic powers of Western Europe. There is perhaps some natural disposition on the part of people so remote from the affairs of Europe to suppose that we have no vital interest in them. The strongest corrective to this point of view is to recall that twice in this century we have been involved in world wars, each of which began in Europe. To-day the only real threat to a third world war comes from the politics, the point of view and the

aggressive actions of the Soviet Union. Europe therefore still remains a matter of vital concern to us.

Again, it is worth recalling that when the 1914/18 war broke out, the Emperor of Germany was shocked to discover with what unanimity the countries of the British Empire came together to resist his attack. Hitler fell into the same error. Unaware as he was of the psychology and spirit of his possible opponents he did not realise that, whatever the Constitutional lawyers might be saying, there is an instinctive unity of feeling among the British peoples which displays itself instantly in times of trial.

Once again I am disposed to believe, or to fear, that the rulers of the Soviet Union may mistake our political differences in our own lands for some spirit of separatism. There could be no greater blunder. We have lived long enough as a nation to know that the peace of the world is indivisible.

Obviously I cannot within the necessary limits of one lecture cover the ground, but there are two points of significance that I would like to make:—

One, there could be no greater danger for a country than to allow its foreign policy and its defence policy to get out of harmony. We, for example, in Australia are and have been for many years committed to Empire defence co-operation. It is an open secret that our defence planning is based upon close consultation with the other British countries, and that in the preparations we make we always have regard to the preparations being made by the other British countries. This has been so under Governments of various colours. The Rocket Range project, for example, established under the Chifley administration, represents a pooling of knowledge and executive co-operation between Great Britain and Australia.

But Empire defence co-operation seems to me to become comparatively pointless if we have not, on the major matters, a common Empire foreign policy.

We hear a great deal in these days about rights of neutrality. But how could Australia, for example, co-ordinate her defence plans with another country if, when the time of crisis came, that other country stayed neutral.

I regret to say that for some years up to and including 1949 there was a dangerous divorce in Australia between



foreign policy and defence policy. Foreign policy was based, first and foremost, upon the Charter of the United Nations and, as I believe, only in a secondary sense upon the British Empire. Yet our defence policy has had no real connection with the United Nations, which has no military strength anyhow. It has, on the contrary, been strictly related to those particular countries in the world who can be expected to be allies in the unhappy event of a third world war.

Two, the other matter which I would like to emphasise relates to the problem of the machinery of consultation between the British nations.

This is a necessary consideration, because we cannot hope to have on great matters common policies without the closest and most realistic consultation.

Nobody in Australia wants British foreign policy to be solely controlled by Whitehall, though, after proper exchange of views, it may well be announced from Whitehall with the greatest practical effect.

It would be foolish for us to suppose that Great Britain does not possess a vital interest in South East Asia and the South West Pacific. Ours may be more direct, more immediate in point of space or time, but hers is at the same time real and abiding.

Similarly, it is a mistake (into which some statesmen at Westminster occasionally fall) to assume that Australia has no real interest in Europe, in the German Peace Settlement, in dealings with the Soviet Union. The more I think about these matters the more satisfied I am that we ought to come back hard to the central truth that wherever we are in the world we are one people, with one set of vital interests.

It might be useful for me to point out that there has been in recent years a remarkable development of international thought in Australia on this point. You may recall that, when the Lyons Government in 1935 put through the Commonwealth Parliament an Act to impose sanctions against Italy in respect to the Abyssinian affair, there was vigorous opposition by leading members of the then Opposition—broadly upon the ground that Australia should not become entangled in overseas affairs. It was said that although we were parties to the Covenant of the League of Nations, that Covenant had become

largely a dead letter and, in any event, our best service to peace was to look after our own business.

This was, as I thought, and still think, a curiously isolationist view. Yet, in 1943, before the war ended, the same party's Minister for External Affairs made a statement to the House of Representatives in which he said:—

“Australia cannot safely limit her interests even to the gigantic area of the Pacific. Twice Australia has taken a prominent part in a world war that commenced because of European questions. With Britain vitally involved *so at once were we*. Our concern with Europe cannot be limited to the waging of wars. We must have some say in taking steps to prevent wars and in changing the conditions which are likely to cause wars. In short, we cannot contract out of Europe. The reason is plain. The centre of the British Commonwealth and Empire is in Europe. From Europe have come all our immigrants. In peace-time much of our trade was with Europe. Our culture is European. European colonies are our neighbours in the Pacific and one of the three great powers of Continental Europe, the Soviet Union, is also a world power and will be a great force in the Pacific of to-morrow. Therefore the peace, order and good government of Europe are vital to us. We are greatly concerned in the European settlement of the future. . . . We are firmly of opinion that the time has passed when either the peace or prosperity of mankind can be regarded as divisible and one continent or one nation can be treated in isolation from another.”

Now to some people these words point to the new mechanism of the United Nations. To me, for reasons discussed elsewhere in this address, they point first and foremost to the concerting of policies and plans first with British Empire countries, and second with the other western democracies.

At this stage it is usually said that, good as it may be to aim at one Empire foreign policy, the aim is impracticable. For, it is said, the difficulties of consultation are so great and the local susceptibilities of the various Dominions so acute, that effectively unitary action is not possible. Speaking as one with some knowledge of theory and practice on this question, I reject this gloomy argument out of hand.

There is at present a good deal of machinery through which views are exchanged between the Dominions and the United Kingdom. Most Dominions maintain High Commissioners in the other Dominions and in Great Britain, and these appointments are reciprocated. An able High Commissioner will, not only *ex officio* but by virtue of his own personality, establish close and confidential communication with the Government to which he is accredited.

Great masses of cables are exchanged between what is now the Commonwealth Relations Office in London and the various Dominions, though in my past experience these communications tended to be so excessively diplomatic in form that they lost some of their reality and nervous strength.

Australia has for many years maintained in London a Liaison Officer between its External Affairs Department and the Foreign Office.

Between the two wars, first class work was done by the Committee of Imperial Defence on Empire defence problems, the normal representative of any Dominion being its High Commissioner, with the occasional addition of a visiting Prime Minister or Minister from his own Dominion.

Occasionally, but irregularly, there are meetings of Prime Ministers.

Between times, Dominion Ministers visit London on matters of urgent importance.

Occasionally, but, alas, all too rarely, some Minister from the United Kingdom will visit a Dominion. But even when this has happened, his return to London has on occasion been shortly followed by his translation to some other sphere of usefulness.

All these matters add up to a substantial amount of communication.

Yet I remain convinced that no system of consultation can be regarded as adequate which has left many people in Australia, including myself, satisfied that decisions of great moment in this country have occasionally been presented to the Australian Government and to the Australian people as *faits accomplis*.

In 1946 there was a partial meeting of Prime Ministers in

London which produced a statement which expressed, with modified rapture, a general approval of the existing methods of consultation. The statement included a significant observation that—

“While all are willing to consider and adopt practical proposals for developing the existing system it is agreed that the methods now practised are preferable to any rigid centralised machinery.”

In this reference to “centralised machinery” one sees the traditional opposition to anything that might even appear to involve control from Downing Street.

It is a point of view which I must respect, since it is advanced by men of great service and eminence. But I find it very difficult to appreciate. If six Australian Premiers meet with the Prime Minister of Australia at Canberra to discuss matters of common interest which do not fall exclusively either within the Commonwealth or the States’ sphere, nobody reasonably suggests that the fact that the meeting occurs in Canberra involves of itself Canberra control. But if there is a real fear, why not hold Imperial Conferences in turn in the various Dominions as well as in London?

However, the argument for a permanent Empire secretariat, an argument which in the case of Australia goes back at least to Alfred Deakin’s presentation of it in 1907, may, having regard to the 1946 conversations, be treated as temporarily out of Court.

Is there, then, no alternative? I believe that there is such an alternative, and that it can concurrently take several forms. I suggest that, just as before the war, we had a Committee of Imperial Defence so we could, with great usefulness, set up a Committee on Imperial Foreign Policy, to sit in London and to be attended by the Foreign Secretary representing the United Kingdom Government and by the High Commissioners or visiting Ministers representing each Dominion.

It should sit regularly, and its work should be regarded as of major importance. I suggest also that as the 1946 fear was of “rigid centralised machinery” we should adopt the alternative and go for flexible localised machinery or, in brief, the establishment of a small British Empire secretariat in each Dominions capital.

What I have suggested on this point is very much in line with suggestions made by Mr. Paul McGuire in his recent brilliant book "Experiment in World Order." He was good enough before writing this book to discuss his proposals on this matter with me, and they command my warm approval. After all, we will best understand how to attack the problem of consultation if we first ask ourselves—"What is consultation designed to do?"

Let me endeavour to answer this question in a few sentences. Consultation is designed to produce complete mutual understanding and a community of ideas leading to common policies and concerted action. If consultation is to do this, it must occur at the right time, that is, before decisions are made or even half-crystallised. There is nothing more irritating, as I know from my own earlier experiences, than to be presented with some almost adopted conclusion, with a request for concurrence and, in effect, a hint that negotiations have proceeded so far that a failure to concur may prove embarrassing. If consultation is to occur early enough to be effective it is quite obvious, having regard to the state of flux in which human affairs exist, that it must possess continuity. The work of collating and exchanging facts and ideas must therefore not be merely done *ad hoc* but with permanency.

I know that there exists in some minds a grave fear that this integration of the Empire mind and the Empire effort, which I unhesitatingly advocate, will give rise to hostilities in other countries, and that therefore we must at all times avoid creating the impression that there is "an Empire bloc." This view seems to me to be so pusillanimous and so basically wrong that I can with difficulty discuss it with patience.

The problem is not one of lining up the countries of the British Empire *against* the world but of associating the countries of the British Empire *in* the world. My plea is not for some half-baked notion of the British Empire beating the drum and throwing out its chest and telling the rest of the world to "come on." It is a much graver and more rational notion than that. It is, in brief, that we have gone on long enough emphasising our points of difference and insisting upon our utter independence. If we devote too much of our energy much longer to this constant assertion that we are adult nations,

people will merely begin to doubt whether we are grown up at all.

What we need, for all the compelling reasons which I have indicated earlier, is a re-integration of our thought and of our effort, a new vision of Empire.

### IS EMPIRE UNITY INCONSISTENT WITH AMERICAN CO-OPERATION?

It is clear that a closely-knit British Commonwealth, though it will have great strength, cannot for very long stand alone. This simple but cogent truth has been demonstrated in both of the great wars in this century. We must therefore consider what is our greatest practical international problem, that of our relations with the United States. We do badly to think this problem is a simple one. There are those who seem to feel that America's colossal unitary strength makes British Empire corporate strength less important.

"The centre of gravity of democracy," they say, "has moved West. Let us accordingly re-arrange not only our policies but our point of view. Great Britain is vulnerable and economically hard-pressed. Canada is in the American orbit. South Africa is troubled and internally uneasy. The new nations of the Indian sub-continent are moving away from us. We are on the defensive in South-East Asia. Australia and New Zealand are isolated and not rich in numbers. Let us be realistic, think less of our old Empire associations and move as far as possible into the American hemisphere." That is one view, not without some currency. It is in my opinion a pessimistic and distorted, and, therefore, unreal view.

To me it seems fantastic to suppose that a British Commonwealth which has performed such prodigies twice in the last 35 years should be so casually discarded as worn-out or purposeless. It is perhaps not an inappropriate occasion to say that, in the two great testing periods of this century, the British family of nations has demonstrated its strength and its vitality, not its weakness or its decadence.

A second view goes to the other extreme. It has been unconsciously influenced by the subtle and pervasive Communist propaganda about "American Imperialism." It says in effect that we should avoid American involvement and retain our

character as a third power, independently placed, taking no sides hastily, acting as the honest broker in the disputes between the totalitarian East and the democratic West. This view, which I have encountered in some places, is a form of isolationism which has no relation to modern international life. The truth, as I see it, can be put into a few sentences. We, the British peoples of the world, need the Americans. The Americans need us. America has on two historic occasions learned that the peace of the world is not divisible. On two occasions, in a war which many of her people thought no business of theirs, she has become a belligerent and has in the final result weighed down the scales in favour of freedom. It is, therefore, idle to say to any enlightened American that what happens in Europe is no concern of his, or that what happens to Australia or New Zealand is no concern of his. He knows that predominant power means predominant responsibility. He knows that the overthrow of Great Britain would mean that domination of Europe by the common enemy and would lead to an American isolation which would be for the American people not merely ominous, but disastrous. He, therefore, knows that Great Britain is a bastion of liberty, and Western Europe the frontier in any crucial fight. I do not for one moment believe that any responsible American leader wants to have a weak Great Britain or a weak British Empire. The best support for this view is to be found in the magnificent post-war battle by the United States, through Marshall Aid and other means, for the restoration of the other Western democracies and for the drawing of a clear line against Imperialist aggression.

Correspondingly, it is impossible to believe that there is among our own people any jealousy or resentment of America's activities. After all, America has not become our friend and defender simply for love of the countries we inhabit. On the contrary, she knows that, in the most real sense, we are the same kind of people, with the same ideas, with the same ideals, with the same high faith, with the same basic belief that governments exist for the people, that they are the servants and not the masters. It is a tragedy that the world should be divided at all; but if it is, we may at least be comforted by the recollection that it is divided between those who believe in the spirit and significance of man and those who believe in power for its own sake.

It follows from all this that the American and the British peoples have strong bonds not only of common interest but of common spiritual values. The case for our co-operation is therefore complete. That there is much work to be done before we arrive at a complete mutual understanding nobody can doubt. The special arrangements between the British peoples which found their expression in the Ottawa Agreements may sometimes seem to the American citizen to represent a policy of exclusion and almost of superiority. Yet we know that such arrangements were designed merely to develop our internal strength and give expression to our belief that prosperity within the British family must tend to reflect itself in prosperity for the rest of the world. We, in our turn, must recognise that our British Commonwealth policies should not be pursued in such a fashion as to give rise to a feeling that we regard America as a potential enemy, either economic or military. Enmity between the British Commonwealth and the United States would indeed be disastrous to the freedom of man. While we preserve our British character, therefore, we must be assiduous in the task of establishing not only understanding but co-operation with the United States. We need each other.

This may all be well illustrated by reference to the current movement for Western Europe unity in which Great Britain must obviously play so great a part.

When I was last in the United States a little more than eighteen months ago, I encountered a disposition in some quarters to think that Great Britain must make her choice between her own Commonwealth and Western European union. This seemed and seems to me to be a false choice. It seems to assume that the British Dominions have no vital concern with Europe, and that Great Britain herself, therefore, is in the classical position of saying, "How happy could I be with either, were t'other fair charmer away." But once it is understood that we of the King's Dominions have an interest in Europe, out of which the two great wars of our history have come, it becomes clear that the real task is not to make a choice but to make a reconciliation. That Great Britain, now that the old days of keeping the balance of power in Europe have gone, should accept direct and primary European responsibilities is inevitable. The practical task of statesmanship is to see that whatever she does in that sphere should be done not only in consultation with the



other British countries but with their co-operation. Provided consultation exists not only on the highest level but with the most complete permanent means of mutual exchange on facts and views, there is no reason why British participation in Western European stability should not be in the widest and best sense of the term "British" and not merely that of the United Kingdom.

The wider the interest, the wider should be the co-operation; the more vital the interest, the more vital should be the participation of all concerned. I for one am confident that with sensible and sensitive statesmanship the United States, the United Kingdom and all the British Commonwealth countries will find themselves working together and, if necessary, fighting together to preserve freedom in a world which knows so much about it in theory and in so many places practises it so little.

### CONCLUSION.

Let me return, in conclusion, to the nature of the British Commonwealth. It is more than a group of friendly powers.

It is more than a series of concerted economic interests.

It is and must be a living thing—not a corpse under the knives of the constitutional dissectors.

It would be the tragedy of our history if what began as a splendid adventure and grew into a proud brotherhood should end up as a lawyer's exercise. When the Empire ceases to be an inner feeling as well as an external association, virtue will have gone out of it.

In every war the fires of patriotism burn high. After every victory they seem to dwindle and smoulder. Sometimes they seem dead. True sentiment becomes condemned as mere sentimentality, and we become the victims of a curious reluctance to show abroad our love for and our pride in the land of our birth and those other lands to which our fathers of old went with light and liberty. Yet we have much matter for honest pride. When we suddenly realise that a great country like India has at a stroke achieved Parliamentary self-government as a Republic, let us waste no time in melancholy yearnings after the past.

Let us, on the contrary, remember that Parliamentary government, democratic public administration, the rule of law, the justice of right and not of privilege, were our peculiar British gifts to India. That the people of India should have proved apt pupils is no matter for regret; it was, on the contrary, the end purpose of our presence. I would like to be able to say to all the British people of the world, if they cared to listen to so small a voice, that our true brotherhood must be a matter of feeling and not merely a matter of thought; no vain glory, no arrogant sense of power, no jingoism, but an unquenchable sense of common destiny and common duty and common instinct. To many people the British Empire is a curious machine that has worked; looking to the outsider rather like a Heath Robinson invention; but relied upon by mankind twice during this century, to their great deliverance. But what does it mean to you? I think I know what it means to me. May I break through our usual polite reticences and tell you?

To me the British Empire means (and here you will find a curious jumble in both time and place) a cottage in the wheat lands of the North West of the State of Victoria, with the Bible and Henry Drummond and Jerome K. Jerome and "The Scottish Chiefs" and Burns on the shelves. It means the cool green waters of the Coln as they glide past the church at Fairford; the long sweep of the Wye Valley above Tintern, with a Wordsworth in my pocket; looking north across the dim Northumbrian moors from the Roman Wall, with the rowan trees on the slope before me, and two thousand years of history behind; old colour and light and soaring stone in York Minster. It means King George and Queen Mary coming to their Jubilee in Westminster Hall as Big Ben chimed out and Lords and Commons bowed, and, as they bowed, saw beyond the form of things to a man and a woman greatly loved. It means Chequers, and, from the crest beyond, that microcosm of history in which you may, with one sweeping glance, see the marks of British trenches, the "Roman Road to Wendover," the broad Oxford plains, and (by the merest twist) the plumed figure of John Hampden walking through the fields to the church whose spire is just to be seen, at Great Kimble, to address the gentlemen of Buckinghamshire on Shipmoney. It means, at Chequers, Winston Churchill, courage and confidence radiating from him, the authentic note of the British lion in his

voice, the listening world marvelling at how such triumph could be built upon such disaster. It means the Royal Mile at Edinburgh, and a toast from kilted clansmen in the Valley of the Tay, and a sudden cold wind as I came one day up from a Yorkshire dale. It means laughter in Lancashire; Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge. It means Australian boys in tired but triumphant groups at Tobruk and Benghazi; Cunningham at Alexandria, with his flashing blue eyes, talking to me of the Australian, Waller; Australian airmen in Canada, in Great Britain, all over the world. It means, at Canberra, at Wellington, at Ottawa, at Pretoria, the men of Parliament meeting as those met at Westminster seven hundred years ago; at Melbourne the lawyers practising the Common Law first forged at Westminster. It means Hammond at Sydney, and Bradman at Lords, and McCabe at Trent Bridge, with the ghosts of Grace and Trumble looking on. It means a tang in the air; a touch of salt on the lips; a little pulse that beats and shall beat; a decent pride; the sense of a continuing city. It means the past ever rising in its strength to forge the future.

Is all this madness? Should I have said, as clever, modern men are wont to do, that the British Empire means an integral association of free and equal nations, whose mutual rights and obligations you will find set out in the Balfour Formula and the Statute of Westminster? Or should I have watered it down, as some would have us do, and define the British Empire in terms of friendship, or alliance; or pact, as if we were discussing an Anglo-Portuguese treaty?

A plague take such notions. Unless the British Empire is to British people all over the world a spirit, a proud memory, a confident prayer, courage for the future, it is nothing.

"It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles  
And see the great Achilles, whom we know.  
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

## Officers

*Visitor:* His Excellency the Governor-General

*President:* Norman Cowper, Esq.

Further copies of this lecture, and information regarding the Australian Institute of International Affairs may be obtained from:

### *State Secretaries:*

The Secretary  
Victorian Branch A.I.I.A.  
177 Collins Street  
MELBOURNE, C.1.

The Hon. Secretary:  
Canberra Branch A.I.I.A.  
Dept. of External Affairs  
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

The Hon. Secretary  
S.A. Branch A.I.I.A.  
61 Gawler Place  
ADELAIDE, S.A.

The Secretary  
N.S.W. Branch A.I.I.A.  
369 George Street, SYDNEY

The Hon. Secretary  
Queensland Branch A.I.I.A.  
Lochiel Chambers  
323 George St., BRISBANE

The Hon. Secretary  
W.A. Branch A.I.I.A.  
66 Melville Parade  
S. PERTH, W.A.

The Hon. Secretary  
Tasmanian Branch A.I.I.A.  
Solicitor General's Dept.  
HOBART, TASMANIA

The General Secretary  
A.I.I.A.  
369 George Street, SYDNEY