

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

SPEECH

BY

Rt. Hon. SIR ROBERT MENZIES,  
K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.,

ON

**COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTERS'  
CONFERENCE.**

[From the "Parliamentary Debates," 18.8.64.]

Sir ROBERT MENZIES (Kooyong—Prime Minister)—by leave—After I returned from my overseas visit, and Parliament not being in session, I gave a long Press and television interview. It is not my purpose to repeat all that I then said—the verbatim tape record will be available to honorable members—but I do propose to say something about some of the highlights of my work.

For the record, I will say at once that I propose a little later to lay on the table of the House the text of the final communique of the Prime Ministers' Conference.

I had intended to pay a visit to Israel. Indeed arrangements for this visit were well advanced when, by reason of illness, I found, with very great regret, that I had to cancel my journey to that country. I hope to make it on a future opportunity. In the result, I had made sufficient recovery to go to the Prime Ministers' Conference in London via Washington. It was necessary for me to leave London the day after the Prime Ministers' Conference, in order to be back in time for important Cabinet discussions on the Budget.

Two matters emerged from my talks in Washington. The first was that I was keen to discover from the Administration

whether the statement I had made in this House on the A.N.Z.U.S. Treaty was one with which they agreed. I should, I think, quote the substance of what I said in the House because there had been some controversy about the position inside Australia and there had been, indeed, some misrepresentation of what the then Minister for External Affairs had said on this matter. In this House on 21st April, I said—

The treaty is between the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Article IV reads—

"Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes."

Of course, this should be in accordance with constitutional processes. Very few countries go automatically into a state of war. They all have certain procedures to go through but, subject to constitutional processes, which can operate here just as much as they can anywhere else, there is a clear statement that the parties will act to meet the common danger in accordance with their constitutional processes.

The article goes on—

"Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security."

Article V reads—

"For the purpose of Article IV, an armed attack on any of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of any of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."

Those words do not produce automatic hostilities, because reference is made to constitutional processes, but they contain in the clearest terms a high-level acceptance of responsibility. It is not for us to assume that any great ally of ours will avoid that any more than we will avoid it.

There is a contract between Australia and America. It is a contract based on the utmost goodwill, the utmost good faith and unqualified friendship. Each of us will stand by it.

I was happy to find in Washington that my statement was accepted as a completely accurate interpretation and that the State Department had, in fact, circulated it as a definite statement on the point. This, I think, revealed a state of affairs eminently satisfactory to Australia. It has, as I pointed out last week when we were debating these matters, been powerfully reinforced by the recent statement of President Johnson, and the terms of the resolution of both Houses of the Congress. In the second place—and I think I should report this having regard to some comments that have been made—President Johnson very promptly, at the beginning of our discussions, stated his pleasure and the pleasure of the American people at our contribution to the defence of South Vietnam. He expressed pleasure both with the content of our response and the prompt way in which we had made it.

It is sometimes thought that Australia's efforts in these fields, being relatively small, are either of no significance or must provoke some American criticism. This is not so. The United States is the greatest power in the world. It has given enormous aid to other countries. It must occasionally feel somewhat isolated. It would be more than human if it did not occasionally feel that it was being cast for the role of the world's gendarme with the major responsibility for keeping the peace. It is because of these things that in Washington contributions by other countries are welcomed as an identification by other countries of their world interests with those of the United States.

I have repeatedly said that while we rely and will continue to rely very much on the collaboration of the great powers in

our own defence, that collaboration involves mutual obligations which we will at all times be prepared to honour. This is well understood. I have not been able to detect any mental reservations about the friendship of the United States for Australia or—and this is of broad importance—the determination of the United States to do all in its power to preserve the peace in South East Asia and to prevent the spread of aggressive Communism. This attitude of mind has, in fact, been illustrated vividly by recent events.

When I went on to the conference in London, I was quite convinced that something should be said to strengthen the position of Malaysia and to make it clear that, as a Commonwealth country, it enjoyed the support, physically or morally or both, of all the Commonwealth nations. Honorable members will be familiar with what I will call "the new vocabulary". There is a strong opposition to "colonialism" and to "imperialism" and to what is now called "neo-colonialism." As I understand it, "neo-colonialism" is an expression which relates to a new or derivative form of "colonialism". It is, as honorable members know, an expression frequently used by the rulers of Indonesia to support their allegation that the creation first of Malaya and then of Malaysia did not represent the termination of "colonial" rule but represented an attempt by the former "colonial" power to use the new independent body and thus to deprive it of some of the attributes of complete political independence.

Considerable play has been made of the fact that the military and paramilitary and economic aid given to Malaysia by the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand represents some desire on the part of predominantly European nations to maintain a position of influence and thus to treat Malaysia as not fully free. This notion seemed to me—and I believe that I will have the support of honorable members in this view—to have a somewhat dangerous quality. I therefore had a very great desire to secure in the conference some general support for Malaysia, a support which should include that of the West Indian, African and Asian members of the Commonwealth.

A great deal of discussion occurred on these matters with, at one stage, some divergence of opinion but in the long run, I am happy to say, a satisfactory result. There was no disagreement about the statement in the communique that "they will maintain their efforts to reduce the areas of international disagreement with all the means within their power, while maintaining both the strength and the resolution to resist aggression from without or subversion from within". But there was a difference of opinion as to whether, having said this, we should give some assurance to the Prime Minister of Malaysia of our sympathy and support in his efforts to preserve the independence and integrity of his country. Some thought that an expression of sympathy was enough. My own view was that it was inadequate; that one might well sympathise with people without agreeing with them or in any way backing them up. I pointed out, and so did others, that the word "support" did not necessarily connote military support or even material support, since the nature of the support to be given would be for each member of the Commonwealth to determine.

I did my best to point out that every new African nation represented at the Conference was jealous of its own independence and would strongly resent any interference in it by outside people. This, indeed, had been demonstrated in the case of Kenya and Tanganyika, each of which had, after independence, been happy to receive British military aid against aggressive movements. I said as strongly as I could that what was true in the case of African countries was equally true in the case of Asian countries and that Malaysia was entitled at the very least to our strong moral support at the United Nations and around the various diplomatic posts in the world. I expressed the view that a Commonwealth which was not prepared to take a public stand in favour of the political independence and territorial integrity of all its members would be a strange kind of Commonwealth. From our point of view in Australia this is, of course, extremely important. We are not supporting Malaysia, as we do in the most practical terms, because we have some colonialist point of view. We have not. But we do believe that we have obligations to sister members of the Commonwealth while, of course—and this may be stated quite frankly

—we have some particular interest in the preservation of Malaysia having regard to the threat from Communist aggression which presses down upon us or in our direction from the north. I am happy to say that agreement was finally secured upon an expression, not only of sympathy, but of support. This was to me one of the crucial matters in this Conference. The fact that it was resolved in the manner contained in the communique, a unanimous document, is one of the facts which has enabled me to say, as I have said publicly, that the Conference achieved valuable results.

It will, I hope, be remembered—and I repeatedly invited the Conference to remember it—that when Malaysia was created it secured the unanimous approval of an earlier Prime Ministers' Conference, it secured admission to membership of the United Nations by a unanimous vote and that, later on, when it was alleged by Indonesia that the people of the Borneo territories had been ignored, a special mission set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations had found that there was approval in those territories of what had been done.

It follows from all this, as I said to the Conference, that the validity of the existence of Malaysia cannot sensibly be challenged. The challenge to it—in other words the so called confrontation policy of Indonesia—finds its expression in actual military aggression across the frontiers of Malaysia. This being a clear case of military aggression, the argument that there were unsettled disputes has a somewhat hollow sound. The plain fact is that Malaysia is defending itself against aggression and therefore comes plainly within the Commonwealth statement that there should be a resolution to resist aggression from without or subversion from within.

It became clear, as the Conference proceeded, that the problems of the new Commonwealth must be approached patiently and without illusions. An example of this fact is to be found in one reference in the communique. It is as follows—

They discussed the great significance of China for South and South East Asia. They also discussed the question of relations with China and of her membership of the United Nations.

This, it will be seen, conveys very little. The reason for this is that there were deep

divisions of opinion and of emphasis, and that these rendered a more positive statement impossible. I must recognise that from the point of view of most of the African countries, Asia, particularly South East Asia, seems a long way off. They do not feel that Communist China presents any threat to them. When I presented views which are based upon the aggressive policies and activities of China in and around Laos and Vietnam, I was told that this was cold war talk, and that the cold war was, for purposes of a Prime Ministers' Conference, an irrelevancy. In some quarters there even seemed to be an assumption that the cold war had been created by the West, and a failure to understand that but for the tenacity and success of the great Western powers in resisting the cold war and deterring a hot one, the Prime Ministers might have been meeting, if at all, in very different circumstances.

I mention this not by way of criticism but by way of explaining some of the atmosphere of a new Commonwealth meeting. New nations, with different histories and backgrounds and emotions, cannot be expected to fall into our inherited patterns of thought, or to see world conflict in the same light as those of us who have treaty associations and obligations and indeed special regional problems of security and survival. But I am not at all despondent. The greatest value of these conferences is that we are all conscious of our special, though undefined, relationship to each other, that we exchange our experience and views with great vigour, but with personal goodwill, and that we learn something from each other.

The Conference having noted—I am sure with great satisfaction—that since the war more than 20 countries, with a total population of some 700 millions, had been brought to self-government by Great Britain, and that others will shortly be added to the list, became involved in a discussion about Southern Rhodesia. Now, we all agreed at the outset, and reaffirmed unanimously in the communique, that “the authority and responsibility for leading the remaining colonies to independence must continue to rest with Britain”. In spite of this, and of the further fact that under the agreed Southern Rhodesian Constitution of 1961, there will be an African majority of

electors within a period variously estimated at from five to ten years—I think I heard somebody say it might be twelve—some of the African leaders said they wanted a discussion. It was pointed out to them that as any further negotiations must be conducted by Britain and as there were strong political views and differences in Southern Rhodesia itself, advice or instruction to Britain might well complicate a task already sufficiently delicate and difficult.

In the result, it was agreed that the Southern Rhodesian problem should not be discussed in full conference, but in a closed session with restricted membership.

At the end of the Conference, it was agreed that the matter could be referred to in the communique, in the terms which I now quote—

At the same time, Prime Ministers of other Commonwealth countries expressed their views to the Prime Minister of Britain on the question of the progress of Southern Rhodesia towards independence within the Commonwealth. They welcomed the decision already announced by the British Government that, as in the case of other territories, the existence of sufficiently representative institutions would be a condition of the grant of independence to Southern Rhodesia.

We all agreed about that. It continues—

They also noted with approval the statement already made by the British Government that they would not recognise any unilateral declaration of independence—

We all agreed about that—

and the other Prime Ministers made it clear that they would be unable to recognise any such declaration.

The view was also expressed that an Independence Conference should be convened which the leaders of all parties in Southern Rhodesia should be free to attend. The object would be to seek agreement on the steps by which Southern Rhodesia might proceed to independence within the Commonwealth at the earliest practicable time on the basis of majority rule. With a view to diminishing tensions and preparing the way for such a conference, an appeal was made for the release of all the detained African leaders. The Prime Ministers called upon all leaders and their supporters to exercise moderation and to abstain from violence; and they affirmed their belief that the best interest of all sections of the population lay in developing confidence and co-operation, on the basis of tolerance, mutual understanding and justice. In this connection, they recognised the necessity for giving confidence to the minority community in Southern Rhodesia that their interests would be protected.

The Prime Minister of Britain said that he would give careful consideration to all the views expressed by other Commonwealth Prime Ministers. At the same time he emphasised that the Government of

Southern Rhodesia was constitutionally responsible for the internal affairs of that territory and that the question of the granting of independence was a matter for decision by the British Parliament.

Frankness requires that I should tell the House that I, for one, did not associate myself with this public tendering of advice—advice which might be interpreted in some quarters as instructions—to the Government of the United Kingdom, which alone, as was expressly conceded, had the power and the responsibility. I want to put my position on record to my brother members of this House. So that there may be no misunderstanding, I should make it clear that—

- (a) The Australian Government had already offered friendly advice to the Government of Southern Rhodesia, stating our belief that the end result to be arrived at, if Southern Rhodesia wished to be admitted to the Commonwealth, was a voting roll which would provide an African majority.
- (b) We took the view that if this result was not achieved in due course, it would probably be impossible for the United Kingdom to grant independence and therefore Southern Rhodesia could not be admitted to membership of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth being an association of independent nations.
- (c) A unilateral declaration of independence before the necessary conditions existed had no chance of Commonwealth recognition, and would tend unhappily to isolate Southern Rhodesia from Commonwealth affairs.

Those are all views that we ourselves had put, through me, to Southern Rhodesia.

On the other hand, I indicated to the Conference that I thought it would be a dangerous precedent, and an invasion of domestic jurisdiction, for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers to get into a position of sitting, as a body, to examine the affairs of other members, and pronouncing public judgments. I said that it was not difficult to foresee circumstances in which any one of us might find this intolerable.

This difference of view explains some of the language of the communique. I was, of course, as I hardly need to say, not

opposed to the idea of a constitutional conference about Southern Rhodesia—indeed, that is inevitable—or the adequate representation of the African citizens; this is completely proper. But I felt strongly that the Government of the United Kingdom should not be handicapped in its negotiations by public statements which could increase its difficulties by stiffening resistance. After all, the problem is not easy, and needs to be solved in an atmosphere of mutual understanding.

It is proper to remember that there are many thousands of settlers in Southern Rhodesia, frequently of long standing and with no other homes, strongly British in their allegiance and with legitimate rights to be protected, who will be unhappy at becoming a minority in what is now a fashionable African concept—a one party republican state.

But, Sir, I am sure that most of them, watching the tides of events in other former African colonies, realise that there must be an accommodation, and that in due course—and not too long a course—an accelerated movement towards adult suffrage must be completed, or the alternative accepted, of mounting internal disorder, of hostility among neighbours, and of a result finally achieved in an atmosphere of hostility, not friendship, with racial hostilities unfavorable to the continuance of European settlement and out of harmony with those inter-racial relationships for which the new Commonwealth has come to stand.

In the course of the general survey of world affairs with which we normally begin in Prime Ministers' Conferences I thought it proper to make some reference to the still current dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. This is a dispute which has considerably embittered relations between these two great countries and has led to circumstances which do not aid the presentation of a common front to common dangers. Naturally, I had nothing to say about the merits of the dispute, about which there are deep differences of opinion. All I was concerned to say was that, if the dispute could be solved by some mutual accommodation, it should be of great advantage to all of us. In view of what has been subsequently said, I should make it quite clear that the Conference did not

debate the merits or nature of these differences of opinion. But it did happen that the distinguished President of Pakistan, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, and the Minister for Finance in India, Mr. Krishnamachari who, in the absence of Mr. Shastri, most ably represented India, both made speeches of a helpful kind. We all hoped that if the atmosphere so created continued we might see a settlement. But quite clearly the problem is one for the two countries concerned.

I repeat that, as a meeting of Prime Ministers, we were not sitting in judgment. We thus by implication re-affirmed our belief, to which I have referred elsewhere, that we are not an arbitral body, that we do not sit in judgment and that we recognise that there are very important domestic or intra-Commonwealth problems in relation to which we should not seek to impose our views.

We had some discussion, perhaps not enough, looking back on it, on the importance of and the problems associated with economic development in the Commonwealth. I say not enough, because I felt that rather too much of our time was devoted to the problem of Southern Rhodesia. In the result, the economic problem might have been dealt with in too general a way and without useful definition if it had not been for the fact that the Government of the United Kingdom put forward a series of positive proposals. These were put forward as practical ways in which the Commonwealth could be given added vitality, meaning and purpose, as a sort of co-operative association so as to be able to help both its own members and the world at large, and thereby contribute to world peace by the raising of living standards and the achievement of economic progress. As the Communique records, various proposals were advanced. They were in a broad way accepted in principle. The final decision was that they were to be put into study by officials in the first instance to determine how best they could be carried into effect. Some of the proposals were as follows—

- (a) That technical assistance on a co-operative project basis within the Commonwealth should be provided to aid the development and use of resources.

I pause here to say that, as I said in the Conference itself, it is a mistake to think of the Commonwealth as an associa-

tion of rich countries. Some indeed are very poor. Some, like our own country, are far from poor but are still heavily involved in the importation of capital and technical skill for our own industrial development. Great Britain alone can be described as a capital exporting country; but, as the Prime Minister of Great Britain pointed out more than once, sometimes with a wry smile, there is a limit to what a nation with its own balance of payments problems can do. We were, therefore, not so much talking in terms of massive capital assistance as we were in terms of technical assistance, in which field so much may be done by one for another. I return to the proposals—

- (b) The encouragement of closer contacts between professional and other bodies within the Commonwealth to strengthen the links between us.

This is, I think, an attractive proposition. It is quite true that nobody can attend a modern Prime Ministers' Conference without realising, sometimes with a shock, that we have very different ideas about the institutions of government, and indeed, very different ideas about democracy itself. Quite a few of the newer Commonwealth nations have one-party systems in which the principle of one man, one vote becomes quite ironical. Some have different ideas on the rule of law from those which we entertain. Some have different ideas about the treatment of minorities from those which we entertain. It would indeed be quite impossible today to make a speech about the Commonwealth in which the point was made, as it used to be made years ago, that we all had great constitutional ideas in common; that we all believe in Parliamentary democracy, in the sovereignty of Parliament, and in the rule of law. The sober fact today is that some of us do and some of us do not. But this is not a matter about which we are to lecture each other. Indeed, I have constantly opposed any idea that we are to interfere in each other's domestic affairs. Such interference violates the most classical precepts of foreign policy; it is quite contrary to the Charter of the United Nations; and it is in my opinion a matter which could seriously damage intra-Commonwealth relations. For these reasons, I was very glad to find some attention directed towards the establishment of closer contacts

on matters in which we do have some common interest and some common desire for advancement. Examples of these are obviously to be found in the establishment of closer contacts between professional and other bodies in relation to which there is this community of interest.

Incidentally, Sir, I noticed recently that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Calwell) seemed to be under the impression that I lectured the Prime Ministers on the advantages of private enterprise. I can relieve his mind; no such incident occurred. Nobody has been more careful than I have been to make it clear that each member of the Commonwealth is entitled to adopt whatever system of government it likes, and whatever economic principles or policies seem best to it. I have attended the last nine Prime Ministers' Conferences. In that time, there has never been a discussion on private enterprise or socialism. The proposals continue—

- (c) The proposal that we should aim at the provision of financial assistance to the developing of higher education in Commonwealth countries.

Here again there is no doubt a limit to financial aid. We know from our own experience in Australia that higher education is not cheap. Indeed the cost of university education in Australia is mounting at a most formidable rate, while we have recently received a report in relation to Papua and New Guinea which recommends further developments of this kind in those territories.

Yet there still remains a field of aid which we all thought should be explored. It may well be that Australia can aid some other Commonwealth country or countries by providing expert advice in the universities field; by the provision of visiting professors, lecturers or administrators. For similar purposes, we must continue to receive in our own universities students from other countries and particularly from Commonwealth countries with whom we have such a special association and such close engagements. The next proposal was—

- (d) The encouragement of specialised training and research in public administration with special emphasis on the needs of developing Commonwealth countries.

This, I venture to say, is of prime importance. That wise man, the Prime Minister

of Nigeria, who presides over the destinies of the largest of the African nations, has more than once said to me that the great shortage in all these countries is a shortage of competent administrators. Here, I think, we can help each other a good deal. The Government of the United Kingdom had in mind the establishment of some special teaching or training body in London or in connection with some university. I by no means reject this idea, but I do feel that in the long run the best training in administration that can be given to people from other Commonwealth countries is that they should be, so to speak, fitted into the public service of a more experienced nation so that they may learn something of the rules and practice of administration and something of the mental and moral attitudes which distinguish an advanced Civil Service in a politically advanced country. The last proposal I wish to mention was—

- (e) The convening of a Commonwealth Medical Conference in 1965.

This idea fits into what I was saying earlier about professional bodies. Such a conference would do good, because the problems not only of personal medicine but of public health are of immense importance, more particularly in new nations where medical services may be scanty and the problems of public health extremely complex.

These various proposals, and there were others, the nature of which is broadly stated in the communique, must be converted from vague expressions of principle into practical schemes. Our officials will willingly contribute to this result. If, in some or all of these matters, an effective result is achieved, we will, I think, have done a great deal to put substance into a Commonwealth relationship the nature of which has so changed in recent years, and to counter the scepticism which is frequently expressed as to the capacity of the new Commonwealth to endure.

The proposal for a Commonwealth Secretariat is of course not a new one. It had, over a period of years, been put forward in general terms by Mr. Curtin and myself and others. On this occasion, the idea was first mentioned in the meeting by some of the African Prime Ministers. The suggestion was that there should be established in

London "a central clearing house". In the first instance, it was suggested that it should prepare documents on trade aid and development and should circulate information on these matters to all the members of the Commonwealth. Then, by way of further or alternative suggestion, it was proposed that the Secretariat might assist in the preparations for the meetings of Prime Ministers in the sense of receiving and circulating papers, which would make us all much better informed of other problems when we arrived. I myself drew attention to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the small and useful secretariat which it has. I felt that a Secretariat for the Commonwealth on the Parliamentary Association model might encourage members to put forward papers and proposals for circulation, information and consideration in advance of Prime Ministers' meetings.

After general debate amongst the Prime Ministers, it was decided to ask an official committee to go into the proposal further and to report back to the Prime Ministers on what functions a Commonwealth Secretariat should perform. The view I stated was and is that the task of the Secretariat should be to pool and co-ordinate and disseminate information of a factual kind. There should be no question of a policy or executive role. As the examination proceeds, there may well be considerable differences of opinion as to what a Secretariat should do. Some may

wish to have something resembling the office and functions of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with considerable executive significance. We must, I put to the House, be astute to avoid constituting the Commonwealth as a sort of committee of the United Nations, with resolutions and votes. If we are to achieve and maintain a special significance, it will be by preserving the informality of our association, and the basic independence which each Commonwealth country brings to the conference table. It was at all times important that this Conference should produce constructive results and thus contribute to the future of the Commonwealth. I think that I should, therefore, pay tribute to the invaluable work of the Chairman. Sir Alec Douglas-Home exhibited at all stages great tact and fairness and admirable flexibility of mind, a broad wisdom and a complete knowledge of the subjects under discussion. Without these elements, I would have doubted more than once whether the Conference would have a satisfactory conclusion. It is proper, therefore, that I should say that what were sometimes acute differences of viewpoint were in a large measure reconciled and that in the result there was a general feeling that the new Commonwealth had great usefulness and could make a powerful contribution to human destiny.

I present the following paper—

Meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers,  
1964—Final Communique dated 15th July  
1964.