

PRESS, RADIO AND TV INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE
PRIME MINISTER, MR. HAROLD HOLT AT MASCOT
AIRPORT, SYDNEY, ON HIS RETURN FROM THE
PRIME MINISTERS' CONFERENCE, LONDON

19TH SEPTEMBER, 1966

Well, gentlemen, as you will have gathered from my comments in London, the conference I have just attended was a very remarkable one. I don't expect ever to attend another like it and certainly I have never attended one like it before. Mr. Wilson, when he was commenting on the conference said that it had come through the flames and there had been a testing of the Commonwealth Association, but it had come through successfully, and I think that is a comment which can be made although it leaves many question marks about the future of Commonwealth Conferences in the years ahead.

I think that we all felt that the solution which emerged after six days of discussion on Rhodesia was not entirely satisfactory to anybody, but it represented the highest common denominator of agreement which could be achieved, and the communique put out on this subject indicated that there were still some important differences of view amongst members of the Commonwealth - some feeling that force was the answer; others joining with Great Britain in believing that there should be an opportunity given to the Smith regime in Rhodesia to come to constructive and positive negotiation with the United Kingdom Government which would ensure that eventually majority rule would prevail in that country. The main points of difference here were that the Afro-Asian-Caribbean group, which developed the habit of meeting as a caucus in the course of the conference, wished to ensure that there was no grant of independence without majority rule being a condition of it. The United Kingdom, on the other hand was prepared to negotiate on the basis that provided there was a guarantee of majority rule, there could be a gradual evolution to this result.

The position now is that in the absence of some successful outcome from negotiations, there is likely to be a move to the United Nations for selective sanctions, but Australia is in the position to determine its own course as these developments become known.

The Rhodesian matter was of such burning interest to many of the heads of delegations that it occupied six of the eight days, and at one point, I felt it necessary to remind the conference that we had spent six days of our eight on the affairs of this particular country, and that nine-tenths of humankind who were much

affected by other aspects of our agenda had not been under discussion at all.

We did turn, as a result of the move I made at that time to prevent further adjournment, to a consideration of the world political situation, but unfortunately the discussion of what were, for us, tremendously important matters - Viet Nam being perhaps the most important in Australian eyes - this discussion was of a rather disjointed and perfunctory character because there would be adjournments while we had aspects of the Rhodesian matter - draft communiques and matters of procedure brought back under our notice.

Much the same applied in the case of the talk on the world economic situation. I was given the task of leading the discussion on this subject matter. It contained some elements of very great importance, not only to Australia, but to the world generally, including the pressing matter of international monetary liquidity. It remains a fact that reserves - the world's reserves - are not growing in proportion to world trade. Gold production, except in South Africa, is declining in the free world, and we are seeing symptoms of shortages of liquidity in various developments which are now coming under notice. The fact that money is so scarce, that it is costing so much, that interest rates are becoming so high, the actions of the United Kingdom and the United States in restricting the movements of capital out of their countries by investors into other parts of the world, these are all symptomatic of a growing problem of international monetary liquidity.

It has been relieved to a temporary degree by the swap arrangement which was entered into recently by the United Kingdom, but the problem remains.

Now, there were a variety of other matters at the conference which did, I think, reflect a more hopeful aspect of this Commonwealth Association. There was remarkably little controversy on a number of matters of a fruitful kind, and these are reflected in the communique which was published at the end of the conference. This augurs quite well for the future in that there were so many matters on which a positive, constructive co-operation was manifest. But what marred the conference was the evidence of racial associations through this caucus system which, I believe, prevented a fair and objective study of the subject under review and could be quite dangerous and certainly disturbing to many members of the Commonwealth if this were to become the practice at future conferences. The disproportionate time devoted to one subject matter was again a weakness.

When all these things are taken together, the fact remains

that the heads of delegations of 22 countries in a multi-racial association, representative of all the principal racial groups, and a vast degree of different attitudes, habits of life, history, tradition, matters of that sort, were able to come together and reach an agreed document in respect of a most complex and explosive issue.

It was a conference in which you had all the elements - drama, tension, humour, frustration, exasperation and a variety of other factors, but out of it came agreed communiques, first on the controversial issue of Rhodesia itself and the second covering a wide variety of matters dealt with at the conference.

And so some will be able to claim with justification that the Commonwealth has come through a testing period with the prospect of going on to better work in the future. Others will argue that the price paid in the adoption of these undesirable techniques in the emergence on such a scale of racial attitudes, that these things are both harmful to the future of Commonwealth collaboration and create dangers of their own and perhaps arguments of their own for the future.

In my judgment, we will need more than one conference before we can come to a final judgment as to whether this is a continuing contribution to the well-being of mankind. But my own tentative conclusion is that this does remain the best hope for mankind of a multi-racial association for constructive purposes, and like the United Nations itself, because the aspiration that it embodies is one of the highest that man could hold, we can't discard lightly the desirability of maintaining it in the future.
