

Paul. Branch

13

NATIONAL BROADCAST
BY THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
13 MAY 1975

I would like to report to you on the valuable and wide-ranging discussions I have been having overseas during the Parliamentary recess. With the Special Minister of State and senior officials of the Australian Government, I have been attending the Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Kingston, Jamaica. On the way to Jamaica we visited Peru - the first visit by an Australian Prime Minister to a South American country. And on the way home I had talks in Washington with President Ford, Vice-President Rockefeller, Secretary of State Kissinger and senior members of the United States Congress. So in the space of a fortnight there have been opportunities for Australia to exchange views with leaders from every part of the world - to establish new friendships and build on old ones.

There has never been a time when events in the world have moved so swiftly or suddenly as they have during the past two years. The extraordinary changes in our own region - the recent decisive events in Indo-China - were of course very much in our minds; but that's only a part of the story, part of the pattern of change and upheaval in recent years. Since the Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Ottawa in 1973 there have been far-reaching developments in Africa, in Cyprus, in the Middle East; the western nations have grappled with inflation and unemployment; the gap between the developing and the developed nations has grown wider. So this is very much a time when national leaders must get together to discuss their problems in an atmosphere of frankness and intimacy.

I know there is a tendency in some quarters to disparage the Commonwealth as a debating society, or as the vestige of a bygone empire. I don't share those views for a moment. Here we have an organisation that brings together heads of Government - Presidents and Prime Ministers or their representatives - from 34 nations representing a quarter of the world's people, nations of every kind, rich and poor, consumers and producers, agricultural and industrial, developed and developing, and from every part of the world.

There is an obvious value in this diversity, but there is an equal value in the shared traditions of the Commonwealth partners. The very fact that all our discussions are in English gives an ease and familiarity to our meetings that cannot be valued too highly. It's not so long ago that many member nations were a little cynical and indifferent about the Commonwealth - and some States were reluctant to join it. There is no sign of such attitudes today. At the next meeting, for example, Papua New Guinea will take her seat as an independent nation; and in the years ahead other newly independent countries of the South Pacific will be admitted to Commonwealth membership. So year

by year the Commonwealth gains in numbers, gains in strength, and I believe, gains in wisdom, experience, and prestige.

The truly remarkable thing about our discussions in Jamaica was the readiness of every nation to get down to essential issues and the striking measure of agreement we reached. You will remember that Commonwealth conferences in the past were often occasions for squabbling and grandstanding. There were endless confrontations between the nations of the old white Commonwealth and the newly independent states of Asia and Africa. There was nothing of that sort in Jamaica. On the particular issues of racism and de-colonisation, for example, there was complete agreement. Every nation confirmed its total support for the African people of Southern Rhodesia - Zimbabwe - in their struggle for independence on the basis of majority rule. Every nation reaffirmed the need for the Indian Ocean to remain an area of peace and stability and expressed concern about military bases in the region - and when we remember that something like half the member nations of the Commonwealth are island, coastal or hinterland states of the Indian Ocean that is not perhaps surprising. Again, every nation supported the need for international assistance in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Indo-China. Every nation expressed concern at the continued testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons and reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive ban on all nuclear weapons tests.

Every nation supported the withdrawal of foreign armed forces from Cyprus. I was particularly gratified, on the Cyprus question, that Australia was accepted as a member of a committee of eight Commonwealth nations which will seek ways of restoring the independence and territorial integrity of Cyprus on the basis of United Nations resolutions.

On all these issues I was able to put Australia's views, and in every case the outcome was deeply satisfying - not just because the resolutions of the conference happen to coincide with my own Government's foreign policies, but because they represent the views of so many different states, and were reached without rancour, without dissension, in an atmosphere of extraordinary goodwill.

There was one problem in Jamaica that stood out above all others - the need to find a new and equitable international economic order. All of us recognised that many, if not most, of the world's problems really come down to a single basic issue - how best to distribute the world's resources, how best to reduce the disparities between the rich and poor nations, between the haves and the have-nots in the world.

In tackling that question - the most difficult challenge facing mankind - I believe we were tackling the root cause of tension and conflict in the world. Of course it would be rash to pretend that we found the answers, but we did find a remarkable readiness on every side - among the rich industrial nations as well as the poorer ones - to seek the answers. Everyone agreed on the range and complexity of the issues involved. Everyone agreed that trade, not aid, is the real answer to the needs of the developing countries. We agreed to set up a group of experts who will draw up, for consideration by Commonwealth Governments, a comprehensive and inter-related program of practical measures to help close the gap between the rich and poor countries.

In Washington I was able to give some account of our discussions to President Ford, as well as hear his own views on current problems, both in America and the world at large. In the wake of the recent events in Indo-China, the President assured me of America's firm and continuing commitment to her allies in our region and in other parts of the world. Yet welcome as these assurances were, they are not the sole basis for my confidence in Australia's future, in Australia's security, or in Australia's place in the world. Everywhere I went - in my talks in Peru, where we have forged a new and valuable link with a Pacific nation, in my talks in Jamaica with Commonwealth leaders, in my talks in Washington - I found both great goodwill for Australia and a calm, steady belief in the strength of our common institutions, in our friendships and our alliances, in the ability of nations to overcome their difficulties with rational programs and united efforts. Nowhere in my talks with world leaders did I find any disposition to panic, to lose faith, to lose heart, to lose nerve. The United States, in particular, having come through her great domestic and international agonies, will be better placed now to build on her true strengths and profit by past experience. I said as much in Washington; and I pledged that Australia would be a ready and willing partner of the United States in her efforts to build a more rational world order and tackle the great problems of the developing world. We still have to beat some problems at home, but they are no different in kind from those of other comparable countries.

Where we in Australia are truly fortunate is in our strengths - the undoubted strength of our friendships, the rare abundance of our resources, the tested spirit and steadiness of our people, the goodwill we enjoy in every part of the world.
