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L Rengfelt

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in London, 1977. What will happen when they meet again in Lusaka on 1 August?

CAN THE GENIUS OF THE COMMONWEALTH PREVAIL AT LUSAKA?

by Hugh Elliott

WHO WOULD BELIEVE, reading the headlines, that 36 nations from all over our divided modern world have committed themselves together to a common, democratic approach to human affairs? They have signed a pledge to principles of democracy, human rights, and international co-operation, and to finding a more equitable economic balance between rich and poor nations.

This group of nations is the Commonwealth. Its Heads of Government meet every two years. Next week the Queen travels to Lusaka, Zambia, to open their meetings which will last till 8 August.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings provide the world's only opportunity for a frank and intimate exchange of views between political leaders of the world's people, representative of almost every single element in the spectrum of international opinions and positions.

SHRIDATH S RAMPHAL,
Secretary-General,
Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth has been having a bad press lately. One British leader-writer had the arrogance to write recently: 'With so much Commonwealth dirty linen flapping on the line, Mrs Thatcher might well have seen fit to advise the Queen against attending a gathering where she is bound to be associated, if not with violence, then certainly with skulduggery, recrimination and nauseating humbug. As it is, however, Mrs Thatcher is expected to advise the Queen's attendance. Could it be, then, that the British Government has reason to believe that some good could come of the affair after all—that constructive attitudes to Zimbabwe Rhodesia are a serious possibility?'

Why not? Our Western cynicism—and hypocrisy—may be as much part of the problem as the 'skulduggery' we condemn. Africans say of us: who are we to talk with such self-righteous superiority about what is wrong with their countries, when we have murderous bloodshed in Northern Ireland?

The difficulties of the Commonwealth are real. But the astonishing thing about these countries is not their differences but their areas of agreement.

The Commonwealth club of nations has certain unique advantages:

- They all speak a common language.
- They do not all practise democracy fully, but they all have democratic ideals and are aware that their people want to preserve the basic democratic freedoms.
- They keep in touch with each other continually in an interchange of information, much of it confidential, something practised by no other grouping of peoples.
- They have a common fund for development and a number of other agencies for common enterprises. Their experts—the economists, doctors, lawyers, agriculturalists—frequently meet for conferences.

The Commonwealth is people meeting together, consulting, learning from each other, trying to persuade each other and sometimes co-operating with each other, regardless of economics or geography or ideology or religion or race. It is this which makes the Commonwealth valuable.

JULIUS NYERERE,
President of Tanzania

• On thorny issues of disagreement the Commonwealth Heads of Government can meet and talk in private, informally. What they say on these occasions is very different from what they may be ready to say before TV cameras, or in big international gatherings. The vexed question of a threatened boycott of the Commonwealth games was settled informally in a Scottish hotel during a weekend of the 1977 conference in London.

At the International Labour Organisation conferences in Geneva the Commonwealth trade union movement speaks the same language. We all vote together, we have all got a great feeling for democracy. When I go round the world I have a sense of brotherhood with the members of the trade union movement, but there is a greater comradeship of those trade unionists within the Commonwealth.

LORD PLANT,
for eight years UK Workers' Member
of the ILO Governing Body

The strength of the Commonwealth is that it is a microcosm of the whole world. Though it may often fail, it remains one of the groups of nations best able to take creative initiatives. When the dialogue between the rich and poor nations reached deadlock, it was such an initiative, taken during the Commonwealth conference in Jamaica in 1975, that broke it.

Could the Lusaka conference show a way forward on some of the toughest world issues today—on the future of the unwanted 'boat-people' and the refugees of the world perhaps? (There are four million in Africa alone.) Or on oil and energy supplies? Both

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COMMONWEALTH VITALITY



E Peters

Allan Griffith

ALLAN GRIFFITH, currently special adviser to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser of Australia, is a senior official with wide experience of the Commonwealth. He answered questions on the Commonwealth:

What are the major issues the world will face in the next 30 years and how can the Commonwealth help in resolving them?

THE MANAGEMENT of nuclear weapons is an outstanding challenge. The Commonwealth can only make a limited contribution on this problem. There are, however, basic attitudes which underlie the management of all great international issues and it is here that the Commonwealth has a particular role.

The way one race treats another is clearly one of the issues most charged with feeling. We all have inherited biases and prejudices. The racial composition of the Commonwealth makes a fundamental contribution by confronting racially based nationalism.

There are the great issues of poverty—the challenge of how the advantaged countries can improve the quality of life for all, and

how the disadvantaged can equip themselves better to deal with their problems. The Commonwealth's move to establish the Common Fund—the fund for stabilising the prices the developing countries receive for their primary products—has been a helpful step.

There are opportunities for creative initiatives. The regional conference of the Commonwealth held in Sydney has given a great impetus to the development of alternative technologies for producing energy at rural and village level. These energy systems are just as vital to mankind's progress as the requirement for major energy systems alternative to oil. India and Australia, with the support of their Commonwealth regional partners, are exploring ways to translate new village-level technologies into world-wide application. Such systems as the use of village waste to produce methane gas, if applied widely, will slow the serious deforestation of many parts of the world.

Encouraging

Since World War II the world has seen the emergence of numerous nations, big and small, all facing one central challenge—to design political systems which extend stability and create opportunities for individual and economic progress. The evolution of systems of government in the next 30 years will be as challenging as in the past. Even the oldest democracies have to find new ways of encouraging the moral and spiritual de-

velopment of their peoples necessary for democracy. In this respect Western Europe today is only on the threshold of democratic government—and this after two world wars costing tens of millions of lives.

The newer countries are doing much better. India came through the 1975-77 Emergency with a national conviction that respect for individual freedom is vital. Nigeria, after a devastating civil war, is returning to a full elective system of government. Kenya has come through the loss of its distinguished founder with considerable success. The overall picture is tremendously encouraging, and attests to the vitality of the ideas which inspire the Commonwealth.

What is Australia's distinctive contribution to the Commonwealth?

Only in recent years have our leaders had a vigorous approach to Commonwealth affairs; but we have moved with great strides. Australia was the host country for the first Commonwealth regional meeting. Australia derives great benefits from Commonwealth consultations. Our Prime Minister has the opportunity to deliberate on an informal basis with men of widely different experience and perspectives. As a consequence our policies have gained in quality and sureness. We tend to suffer from a sense of isolation. With this can come a loss of perspective, which could be Australia's Achilles heel. The Commonwealth offers friendships and presents us with the realities mankind has to face.

Tea, cricket and not many rules

by Philippe Lasserre
from France

CHARLES DE GAULLE hoped that the former French colonial empire would become a second Commonwealth of nations spreading across the world. But things did not happen that way. Perhaps the Latin mind is too formalistic for such a loose association! Dare one also say that one is enough? The real Commonwealth is so original that it cannot be copied.

To me as an outsider, it carries many of the characteristics of a club: it lives more by its spirit than by its structures; it is a help to be a member, yet one is not tied by too many rules; its countries, despite their diversity, share a common *manière d'être* (tea, cricket and British education), a common use of the English language, a certain attachment to the basic democratic principles.

Members of any club must take care to remain open to the outside world. You can travel around the globe without leaving the Commonwealth, believe that you have seen



the world and yet remain more or less all the time in the same cultural environment. About half the major parliamentary democracies on the planet—and there are few of them—belong to the Commonwealth. If the values of democracy are to progress they must maintain links with the other half (mainly European and Latin democracies), with the EEC, as well as with the rest of the world.

One Commonwealth country carries both the British and the French trade-mark: Canada, with its great and beautiful French province and its six million-strong franco-phone population. Could this be a place where the true spirit of the Commonwealth could be applied: the spirit of reconciliation, the finding of solutions that respect the needs and interests of all, including the minorities, those who are different?

Zimbabwean appeal

JOHN TENDAYI MAPONDERA, from Zimbabwe Rhodesia, is Director of Drum Arts Centre in London:

THE NOISE of international politics seems to make it difficult for our leaders to hear each other clearly. It has meant that many attempts at bridge building among our leaders have had little success. Maybe the Commonwealth which values discrete discussion over tough issues, is the only body which could clear the noise and enable our leaders to come together to talk quietly and to resolve their misunderstandings?

As a Zimbabwean, I appeal to the Commonwealth Conference in Lusaka to create an atmosphere in which a change of attitude could take place among our leaders, so that each one of them could value the significant contribution the others could make for the peace and prosperity of the people of Zimbabwe. The country urgently needs reconstruction and we cannot afford to dispense with the special qualities each of our leaders could bring to it.

We look forward to becoming full members of the Commonwealth. Could it demonstrate its unique character now in the interest of bringing peace, not confrontation, to our country?

Grasping the nettle

by **K Haridas**
Malaysia

AS ONE OF A GENERATION born after the colonial era, I am proud to belong to a member country of the Commonwealth. Its recognition of racial prejudice as a 'dangerous sickness', outlined in the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, is very apt for a multi-racial country like Malaysia. For me this became a reality when, as an Indian, I apologised to Malays and Chinese I knew, for my bitterness towards them. I then felt a new kinship with the people of my country.

South-East Asian countries which house thousands of refugees feel acutely the immensity of the refugee problem. The reactions of these nations may have been harsh, yet they reveal a desperate cry for help.

A determination to grasp the nettle of the problem on the basis of what is right, irrespective of race or colour, would not only give tangible expression to the Commonwealth as a forum of action. It would also assist in consolidating the principles of freedom and democracy within the member nations.

Ideals become a reality as they find expression and commitment in the hearts and minds of people. The strength of the Commonwealth depends on such commitment to its principles at personal, national and international levels.

Topic on the agenda

DON BARNETT, an accountant from Salisbury, returns to his native Zimbabwe Rhodesia next year. Currently in London, he describes some of his feelings at a time when his country is such a focus of attention:

MR VANCE meets Lord Carrington—the main topic is Zimbabwe Rhodesia. Mrs Thatcher meets Mr Fraser—the main topic is Zimbabwe Rhodesia. The Commonwealth Conference takes place in August—and once again, the main topic will be Zimbabwe Rhodesia.

Then there's the news from home. My brother-in-law's friend drops dead beside him, a bullet in his head. 100 metres from our home in Salisbury, the Greek Archbishop's house is attacked. Close friends of my parents-in-law lose their 20-year-old son. A black friend writes of the agony that his home village is suffering through the war. News comes of raids into Zambia by Zimbabwe Rhodesians against Zimbabwe Rhodesians.

Along with the reaction to being a 'topic on the agenda' goes the pain of knowing my part in causing the mess. For most of my life I chose to ignore the arrogance and selfishness in myself and my community which eventually caused the pot of black frustrations to boil over.

There is the agony, too, of seeing that there has been a gigantic leap forward towards change, and yet knowing that somewhere it may not be sufficient to end the war. At the same time one is aware that ideological forces will continue to work for division no matter what happens.

A solution which could deal with all these elements may seem impossible. Yet my experience over the last four years proves that there is a factor, which we normally reckon without. Inside every person—black and white, British and Zimbabwe Rhodesian—

An end to scraps

NIGEL MORSHEAD worked for eight years with the London-based Commonwealth Development Finance Company. He has just returned from three months in Nigeria:

THESE ARE NOT EASY DAYS for an Englishman to be in Nigeria. Since Mrs Thatcher's government was elected, Nigerian papers have carried daily predictions of her lifting sanctions against Rhodesia—and threats of an 'appropriate response' by African nations. British newspapers in turn publish sweeping judgments of African countries, speculating about the Queen's safety in Lusaka.

I described my reactions to a Nigerian friend. I felt that, in Rhodesia, the whites had given away a great deal already, and it was a gift of Providence that so much progress had been made. The elections had been well supported, and peace would be secured if the elected leaders were recognised and sanctions lifted.

there is a magnetic pole, which will respond to the right stimulus. For me it was to face my part in the trouble; it involved re-assessing my whole life, its meaning and motive, and it involved accepting God's authority and correction.

I know that this was not just a flash in the pan with no relevance beyond myself, for I have seen a similar thing in others around me. Through such experiences a miracle has taken place, the gulf between individual white Rhodesians and black nationalists has been spanned by trust, respect and love. This is a victory, a precious gift of God. Yet, in one way or another, there is a price to pay.

Blue-print

How conscious I was of that price when a man I had come to love was shot dead. He was a black nationalist who had responded to that stimulus, as I had. From our totally opposed backgrounds and motivations we came to stand together and look forward to a vision of a nation that could bring an answer to those around us; an answer based on facing the truth, and on the readiness to see where one is wrong, to put that right and to build together.

That chapter was ended by assassins' bullets. Was it therefore all a dream—too good to be true? No. I see the change that took place in us both and I remember the times we sat with others, black and white, in my home, when the change began to spread. These are not dreams, but solid foundations of changed motives, on which we will build the future.

I am committed to this with many others. It must spread at all levels. But we have to keep paying the price: a continuing, costly process of denying every lesser motive—pride, self interest, ambition, the refusal to forgive. We have the proven experiment as foundation, and the vision as blue-print. Now we must become builders under the direction of the Great Architect.

The same events had struck my Nigerian friend quite differently. To him the Rhodesian elections were a false dawn. Had they happened 20 years ago people would have said, 'This is good'. Now the whites, after centuries in power, were proclaiming a new deal, while in fact they were still safeguarding their position in the Assembly, the armed services and the judiciary. Perhaps an inch of progress had been made, but it was too little and too late.

We travelled thousands of miles together, and spoke and showed films to students and others. At one point I began to suggest how we could do things better, and promptly ran into a strong reaction. Advice given English-style did not seem to advance our cause! I fell into silence, which soon led to a suspicion that I was hiding things.

Then I resorted to that most English of tactics. When saying something which I feared would provoke disagreement, I broke it in easy stages to lessen the impact. If you

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are crying out for international co-operation and unselfish solutions.

Overshadowing everything else at Lusaka will be the question of how to bring about a just settlement that will end the war in Zimbabwe Rhodesia. It is a stormy, emotional nerve-issue—on the white side as well as the black. Many fear a disastrous confrontation which could break the Commonwealth. But the issue goes deeper than just whether, or when, Britain should lift sanctions and recognise the Muzorewa regime. A thoughtful African High Commissioner in London said recently, 'We cannot just dismiss Bishop Muzorewa. It is a question of how to bring healing between a number of different groups.'

We believe in the liberty of the individual, in equal rights for all citizens, and in their inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic processes in framing the society in which they live. We therefore strive to promote in each of our countries those representative institutions and guarantees for personal freedom under the law that are our common heritage.

from the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles agreed in Singapore in 1971

A growing number of quiet statesmen are emerging in Africa. Their voices are rarely heard in the press. They believe that there is a better way than violence and threats. One of them expressed it, 'Underlying all, there is in Africa a sense of what is right, a sort of moral consensus about what is the fair way of doing things. Let Britain find that way over Zimbabwe and no matter what demands are

We will use all our efforts to foster human equality and dignity everywhere, and to further the principles of self-determination and non-racialism.

Declaration of Commonwealth Principles

made by some parties, the noise will subside and you will not be seriously opposed—some will even back you.' Undoubtedly there are some Heads of State who hold this view. They may hold the key at the Lusaka conference.

Unexpected voices from other parts of the world may play a key role in the conference. Part of the genius of the Commonwealth is the fact that small countries not only play a part, but can sometimes bring the inspired element which will resolve an issue. For example, in another forum, it was the Seychelles which initiated the motion at the International Whaling Commission earlier this month which has made the Indian Ocean a sanctuary for whales.

Simple honesty works wonders. The Prime Minister of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, speaking informally to an international group, once said, 'I have a built-in superiority—with my six-foot five inches, I naturally look down on most people! But I am more and more aware that God knows every thought of mine. So I have to think twice before I entertain evil about someone.'

The Commonwealth is meant to be the grouping of nations where transparency of motive can be expressed. Bringing in such an element would lead to a new era in international relationships.

Prime Minister Somare put it this way, 'In Papua-New Guinea we aren't so much committed to a political or an economic ideology as we are committed to the total development of our people. This is the development which gives full regard to spiritual values. We are not so much con-

cerned with doubling our gross national product each year as we are committed to ensure that individuals and groups do not suffer because of our selfish desires to progress. We can build the Pacific into an ocean of peace where we are passionately committed to caring for each other.'

Could the same be true of the Commonwealth? At Lusaka it faces perhaps its stiffest test yet. It may fail; but when what is most needed is not negotiating skill, or human wisdom, but trust, healing, the art of reconciliation, that is the moment for a miracle.

Hugh Elliott served in government administration in Nigeria for 33 years, before and after Independence. Since 1967 he has been in Ethiopia, Kenya and most recently made several visits to Zimbabwe Rhodesia. He is the author of 'Darkness and Dawn in Zimbabwe' (Grosvenor Books, 54 Lyford Road, London SW18 3JJ 80p postage paid).

We believe that the wide disparities in wealth now existing between different sections of mankind are too great to be tolerated. They also create world tensions. Our aim is their progressive removal.

Declaration of Commonwealth Principles

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give a lion a carcass to eat, it may go to sleep. But feed it on scraps, and you keep it in a permanently ravenous state. Something in human nature resists being 'prepared' by hints and titbits, for a course of action already decided upon by people whose minds are made up.

Certainly my judicious airing of one thought, and suppressing another—apart from being dishonest—was causing some anger. I learnt much from my friend who was open and straightforward, helpfully putting into words all that he felt. Finally I decided to do the same.

We found ourselves in situations where both of us were needed. People needed encouragement, or to tell us their deepest hurts and fears, and together we asked God for healing and direction. One reviewed his whole life, and wrote letters to help restore relationships which blame and bitterness had soured. Later I told a friend that God seemed to have used us in spite of our differences. He replied, 'Perhaps He used you because of your differences.'

As far as we British are concerned, if our intentions are to be understood we need to face our deepest motives and expose them to the light of day. A straightforward quality appeals to all, even in the toughest bargaining.

