CONFLICTS WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH

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'The sole visible outcome of the conference is the final communiqué. The Prime Ministers reputedly spent two days producing it. The strength of the Commonwealth is bound to be judged outside London by this most unimpressive document. It would be better to admit frankly that there are significant differences within the Commonwealth and to produce something which reflects them more robustly or else to dispense with it altogether.'

(*The Times*, 6.7.57)

THIS epitaph on the recent conference of Commonwealth Premiers does not make it quite clear whether the proposal is to dissolve the Commonwealth or merely to dispense with face-saving documents which only serve to cover up differences! *The Times* has not hidden its displeasure from the moment the conference was announced, but it is extremely unlikely to advocate the break-up of the Commonwealth. Its complaint is against the obvious attempt of the final communiqué to hide the serious conflicts within the Commonwealth. In mid-April it expressed the hope that Mr. Macmillan 'was not over-hasty' in convening the conference. Early in June it thought 'it would be best to postpone the conference until later'. And when the conference was over it described the communiqué as one 'of the type we have grown to expect'. The attitude of *The Times* is indicative of the cool reception everywhere to the final communiqué. This prompted Mr. Macmillan to give a special radio broadcast on July 7—but it was even less informative than the official communiqué. Nor was his choice of words too happy:

> Yes, this was a family meeting. And, as you and I know well, family meetings can be lively, frank, friendly, vigorous, and not always unanimous.

This was the eighth conference of Commonwealth Premiers since the second world war. Three Premiers were absent (South Africa, New Zealand, Ceylon) and sent deputies instead. Only two Premiers, Menzies (Australia) and Nehru (India) had attended before, and the remaining eight representatives (including Macmillan) attended for the first time as official spokesmen of their respective governments. None of the colonies are eligible to become Commonwealth members, and Ghana's independence was achieved just in time for its Premier to attend.

What were the main problems confronting the conference? First, serious divisions arose within the Commonwealth on the British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt last year: since then the Eisenhower Doctrine has enabled U.S. imperialism to make bigger inroads in the Middle East and to become the senior partner in the Baghdad Pact. Second, there were the implications of the British Government's H-bomb tests, of its White Paper on Defence, the effect of this on Nato, on Seato and military plans in the Far East—together with plans for a new war base in Kenya and the South African proposal for an 'African Defence Pact'. Third, there was the serious problem of growing U.S. trade and investment within the Commonwealth, dissatisfaction of the Dominions on trading facilities with Britain and the low scale of British investment, and grave disquiet on the remaining U.S. restrictions on trade with China.

Little or nothing appears in the communiqué on the nature of the discussion on these issues— and even less on any measure of agreement. Using the most non-committal phrases it confines itself mainly to a list of pious declarations:

(1) Increased co-operation between nations.
(2) 'Constructive' action to improve and strengthen the United Nations.
(3) 'Grave concern' at the events in Hungary.
(4) Efforts for a 'limited' agreement on disarmament which would reduce world tension and create conditions for a 'more comprehensive scheme of disarmament'.
(5) Long-term stability in the Middle East depends on 'economic and social progress'. The short-term aim should be to 'relax the tension' between the Arab States and Israel, 'relieve the plight' of the Arab refugees, and tackle the 'unresolved problems' in relation to Suez.
(6) Ease 'tension' and maintain 'peace and stability' in the Far East and south-east Asia, and approval of the 'important contribution' of the Colombo Plan in raising living standards.
(7) The importance of 'high levels of domestic saving' to be secured by 'sound internal policies' to carry through the various development programmes of Commonwealth countries. The United Kingdom would 'continue to play its leading role in furthering economic development in the countries of the Commonwealth', but it was stressed that 'it is also important to encourage investment from other sources on suitable conditions'.

Trading relations within the Commonwealth and the problem of a 'free trade area' in Europe were left over for a later meeting of experts; financial problems were relegated to a meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers *after* the World Bank meeting in Washington in September; and the development of nuclear energy for peaceful construction will be a subject for Commonwealth scientists in 1958.

None of these pious declarations are binding on Commonwealth members—and some of them are not so pious! The door is left wide open for the British Government to undermine the United Nations and to do its utmost in the forthcoming General Assembly to encourage further intervention in Hungarian affairs. The opposition to all the reasonable Soviet proposals to suspend H-bomb tests, abolish nuclear weapons, and planned disarmament will still go on.

There was no agreement among Commonwealth members on these issues. Both India and Ceylon were against H-bomb tests and nuclear weapons and kept out of the discussions on 'defence', and Dr. Nkrumah remained only as an observer. India and Ceylon (even Australia and New Zealand) were against the U.S. restrictions on trade with China, and most of them were dissatisfied with the smooth assurances on United Kingdom trade and investment within the Commonwealth. Faced with India's opposition to the campaign aimed at exploiting the events in Hungary, the conference only 'took note' that the report on Hungary comes before the General Assembly of the United Nations; though Mr. Menzies (Australia) used the occasion of his first broadcast after the conference to vent his spleen on this subject and to object to the U.N. condemnation of the invasion of Egypt.

The conference did not achieve unity within the Commonwealth, but underlying all the discussions (except for reservations by India, Ceylon, and Canada to some extent) was the emphasis on co-operation with United States imperialism. The injunction to 'encourage investment from other sources' obviously means the United States. Mr. Suhrawardy, Pakistan Premier, went to Washington afterwards and made fulsome tributes in both Houses to U.S. leadership against 'international Communism'.

Beneath all these assurances of co-operation with U.S. imperialism are the growing conflicts within the Commonwealth, further stimulated by the steady penetration of United States influence, trade and investment. Even Mr. Menzies made it clear before the conference (April 4) that: 'Under both Seato and the Anzus Pact it seems clear that in the event of war we shall be fighting alongside the U.S.A. . . . it would be manifestly difficult for the United Kingdom to maintain supply lines.' An editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* (May 24) emphasised that Australia and New Zealand 'must gear their defences to the American rather than the British machine'.

In the sphere of trade and investment U.S. imperialism is making big inroads, and Britain's proportion of trade with the Commonwealth is steadily declining (from 46·3 per cent in 1952 to 44·9 per cent in 1956), due largely to the stranglehold created by Britain's trade being tied so closely to the dollar market. On the other hand, United States trade with the Commonwealth between 1952 and 1955 went up by 17 per cent. The contrast is even greater between 1950 and 1955 when U.S. trade increased from 5,957 million to 8,700 million dollars—more than 46 per cent.

Between 1952 and 1955 Canadian exports to Britain rose by £23 million, but to the United States by £234 million—ten times more. Canadian imports from Britain rose by £41 million, but from the United States by £524 million—over 12 times. Of the £6,000 million United States investment in the Commonwealth ($2\frac{1}{2}$ times more than Britain) more than £4,000 million is in Canada, as against £1,000 million British investments. No wonder Diefenbaker was able to exploit the growing opposition throughout Canada to U.S. domination and so bring to an end the 22-year-old Liberal administration which was so closely tied to U.S. imperialism.

The London conference has not solved the conflict of interests within the Commonwealth. Certainly it has done nothing to halt U.S. imperialist penetration. Macmillan laid great stress in his radio broadcast that the Commonwealth is *not* 'a fixed and static thing—it is all the time growing and developing'. He did not specify in which direction it was 'growing and developing'. True, the Commonwealth is changing rapidly, not only due to U.S. penetration, but more particularly to the rapid advance of colonial liberation and the growing impact which India, Ceylon, Ghana, and the prospective new members will make within the Commonwealth.

The existing Commonwealth is held together, not by common interests, but by the dominant forces of British imperialism, which seek co-operation with U.S. imperialism because they fear the growing strength of the socialist world and the advance of the colonies towards independence. But co-operation with U.S. imperialism serves to undermine still further the existing structure of the Commonwealth. The new forces arising within the Commonwealth (particularly India, Ceylon, and Ghana) together with the colonial liberation movement, will realise that their future lies neither with U.S. nor British imperialism, but with the socialist and progressive forces which are paving the way for the abolition of all forms of imperialism.