

Harold Macmillan: The wind of change

When, on 3 February 1960, Hendrik Verwoerd, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, ideologue and architect of apartheid, rose to his feet to move a customary vote of thanks in response to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's (1894 –1986) speech at a luncheon meeting of the South African Parliament, the tone of his rebuttal was indicative of two schools of oratory on a collision course. Macmillan's speech was carefully written and crafted (as can be seen from the preserved notes) and it had been rehearsed a month earlier in Accra. The tone is sedately grandiloquent, reminiscent of Churchill's psalmody yet in keeping with British, formal parliamentary oratory, but aristocratically delivered as a sort of command to lesser beings. Verwoerd's style, by contrast, is direct (he had no preview of the violence of the indictment), ironically well-timed ("There are two ways in which one can approach a motion of thanks... I will not inflict upon you either") and communicational, progressing rapidly from sound bite to sound bite. If anything, in terms of rhetoric, the difference in styles of delivery says more about the gap opening between the declining colonial power holding forth, and the soon fully sovereign, White republic for which a referendum had been announced two weeks before Macmillan's visit, and meant that South Africa, unlike India, would leave the Commonwealth — while the Black majority, silenced and ostracised, observed that odd joust, and its leadership was left to draw far-fetched conclusions. Indeed, the speech delivered in Cape Town had an impact its antecedent delivery in Accra could not have had. It raised the Liberation movements' hopes for a steadfast support by Britain; it may well have been a precipitating agent for the surge of revolt and the violence of repression that followed shortly after Macmillan spoke (the Sharpeville massacre), ushering in a state of emergency that would last thirty years until F.W. de Klerk's speech, at the same Parliament, in February 1990. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission settled on 1 March 1960 as terminus a quo for gross violations of human rights and their amnesty, one wonders if the date should not have been that decisive, critical, demarcating speech by Harold Macmillan — a speech that remains, for that reason, an essential if paradoxical moment in Africa's liberatory eloquence.

The version presented here is transcribed from the audio recording in the BBC's archives. It has been checked against the printed, redacted 'souvenir' published by the South African Parliament and against the typescript bearing handwritten corrections made by Macmillan on the typed folios from which he may have read his address, and which was sent to Parliament through the good offices of the High Commissioner on, ironically, 1 March 1960. There is no record of it in Hansard as the speech was not part of the formal proceedings and debates of Parliament but given at an

American style 'luncheon'. It has also been compared with the version given by Macmillan in Pointing the Way (vol. 5 of his Memoirs). Those differences are a matter for historians of political eloquence. The text presented here is the speech South Africans, Black and White, heard or heard about; the one which played a decisive role in individual and national destinies. Puzzlingly "winds of change" (plural) is the expression Macmillan chose for the first volume (1914-1939) of his autobiography. This erroneous expression is also used on the red leather bound cover of the typescript preserved at the South African Parliament — clearly a later addition, once the name had caught on.

Sources

Transcript of the BBC's recording: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/apartheid/7203.shtml> .

Souvenir of visit by the Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan, Prime minister of the United Kingdom to the Houses of Parliament, Cape Town on Wednesday, 3 February, 1960, pp. 5-14 (with Verwoerd's Vote of thanks, pp. 15-17) (Cape Town: Cape Times, 1960).

Harold Macmillan, *Pointing the Way, 1959-1961* (London: Macmillan, 1972): 473-482, Appendix I.

Harold Macmillan, *Prime Minister's Speech at the joint meeting of both Houses of Parliament in Cape Town* (typescript, first page signed by Macmillan, 56 sheets, 12cm x 14cm, bound and accompanied by a letter from the High Commissioner, dated 1 March 1960, forwarding the speech at Macmillan's order).

Reference

Robert Craig, *A history of oratory in Parliament, 1213 to 1913* (London: Heath, Cranton and Ouseley, 1916[?]).



Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is a great privilege to be invited to address the members of both Houses of Parliament in the Union of South Africa. It is a unique privilege to do so in 1960, just half a century after the Parliament of the Union came to birth. And I am most grateful to you all for giving me this opportunity, I am especially grateful to your Prime Minister who invited me to visit this country and arranged for me to address you here today. My tour of Africa — certain parts of Africa — the first ever made by a British Prime Minister in office, is now

alas, nearing its end, but it is fitting that it should culminate in the Union Parliament here, in Cape Town, in this historic city, so long Europe's gateway to the Indian Ocean, and to the East.

In the Union, as in all the other countries that I have visited, my stay has been of course all too short. I wish it had been possible for me to see, spend longer time here, see more of your beautiful country and to get to know more of your people, but in the past week I have travelled many hundreds of miles and met many people in all walks of life. I have been able to get at least some idea of the great beauty of your countryside, with its farms and its forests, mountains and rivers, and the clear skies and wide horizons of the veldt. I have also seen some of your great and thriving cities, and I am most grateful to your Government for all the trouble they have taken in making the arrangements which have enabled me to see so much in so short a time. Some of the younger members of my staff have told me that it has been a heavy programme, but I can assure you that my wife and I have enjoyed every moment of it. Moreover, we have been deeply moved by the warmth of our welcome. Wherever we have been, in town or country, we have been received in a spirit of friendship and affection which has warmed our hearts, and we value this the more because we know it is an expression of your goodwill, not just to ourselves but to all the people of Britain.

It is, as I have said, a special privilege for me to be here in 1960 when you are celebrating what I might call the golden wedding of the Union. At such a time it is natural and right that you should pause to take stock of your position, to look back at what you have achieved, to look forward to what lies ahead.

In the fifty years of their nationhood the people of South Africa have built a strong economy founded upon a healthy agriculture and thriving and resilient industries. During my visit I have been able to see something of your mining industry, on which the prosperity of the country is so firmly based. I have seen your Iron and Steel Corporation and visited your Council of Scientific and Industrial Research at Pretoria. These two bodies, in their different ways, are symbols of a lively, forward-looking and expanding economy. I have seen the great city of Durban, with its wonderful port, and the skyscrapers of Johannesburg standing where seventy years ago there was nothing but the open veldt. I have seen, too, the fine cities of Pretoria and Bloemfontein. This afternoon I hope to see something of your wine-growing industry, which so far I have only admired as a consumer.

No one could fail to be impressed with the immense material progress which has been achieved. That all this has been accomplished in so short a time is a striking testimony to the skill, the energy and the initiative of your people.

And we in Britain are proud of the contribution we have made to this remarkable achievement. Much of it has been financed by British capital. According to the recent survey made by the Union Government, nearly two-thirds of the overseas investment outstanding in the Union at the end of 1956 was British. That is after two staggering wars which have bled our economy white.

But that is not all. We have developed trade between us to our common advantage, and our economies are now largely interdependent. You export to us raw materials and food, and of course gold, and we in return send you consumer goods or capital equipment. We take a third of all your exports and we supply a third of all your imports. This broad traditional pattern of investment and trade has been maintained in spite of the changes brought by the development of our two economies, and it gives me great encouragement to reflect that the economies of both our countries, while expanding rapidly, have yet remained interdependent and capable of sustaining one another. If you travel round this country by train you will travel on South African rails made by Iscor. If you prefer to fly you can go in a British Viscount. Here is true partnership, living proof of the interdependence between nations. Britain has always been your best customer and, as your new industries develop, we believe that we can be your best partners too.

In addition to building this strong economy within your own borders, you have also played your part as an independent nation in the world.

As a soldier in the First World War, and as a Minister in Sir Winston Churchill's Government in the Second, I know personally the value the contribution which your forces made to victory in the cause of freedom. I know something too, of the inspiration which General Smuts brought to us in Britain in our darkest hours. Again, in the Korean crisis you played your full part. Thus in the testing times of war or aggression, your statesmen and your soldiers have made their influence felt far beyond the African continent.

In the period of reconstruction, when Dr. Malan was your Prime Minister, your resources greatly assisted the recovery of the sterling area. In the post-war world, now, in the no less difficult tasks of peace, your leaders in industry, commerce and finance continue to be prominent in world affairs. Today your readiness to provide technical assistance to the less well-developed parts of Africa is of immense help to the countries that receive it. It is also a source of strength to your friends in the Commonwealth and elsewhere in the Western World. You are collaborating in the work of the Commission for Technical Co-operation in Africa South of the Sahara, and now in the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Your Minister for External Affairs intends to

visit Ghana later this year. All this proves your determination, as the most advanced industrial country of the continent, to play your part in the new Africa of today.

Sir, as I've travelled around the Union I have found everywhere, as I expected, a deep preoccupation with what is happening in the rest of the African continent. I understand and sympathise with your interests in these events and your anxiety about them. Ever since the break-up of the Roman Empire one of the constant facts of political life in Europe has been the emergence of independent nations. They have come into existence over the centuries in different forms, different kinds of government, but all have been inspired by a deep, keen feeling of nationalism, which has grown as the nations have grown.

In the twentieth century, and especially since the end of the war, the processes which gave birth to the nation states of Europe have been repeated all over the world. We have seen the awakening of national consciousness in peoples who have for centuries lived in dependence upon some other power. Fifteen years ago this movement spread through Asia. Many countries there, of different races and civilisations, pressed their claim to an independent national life. Today the same thing is happening in Africa, and the most striking of all the impressions that I have formed since I left London a month ago is of the strength of this African national consciousness. In different places it takes different forms, but it is happening everywhere. The wind of change is blowing through this continent and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. And we must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it.

Of course you understand this better than anyone, you are sprung from Europe, the home of nationalism, and here in Africa you have yourselves created a free nation. A new nation. Indeed, in the history of our times yours will be recorded as the first of the African nationalists. And this tide of national consciousness which is now rising in Africa, is a fact, for which you and we, and the other nations of the Western world are ultimately responsible. For its causes are to be found in the achievements of Western civilisation, in the pushing forward of the frontiers of knowledge, in the applying of science to the service of human needs, in the expanding of food production, in the speeding and multiplying of the means of communication, and perhaps above all and more than anything else in the spread of education.

As I have said this, the growth of national consciousness in Africa is a political fact, and we must accept it as such. That means, I would judge, that we've got to come to terms with it. I sincerely believe that if we cannot do so, we

may imperil the precarious balance between East and West on which the peace of the world depends.

The world today is divided into three main groups. First what we call the Western Powers. You in South Africa, we in Britain, belong to this group, together with our friends and allies in other parts of the Commonwealth, in the United States of America and in Europe call it the Free World. Secondly there are the Communists — Russia, her satellites in Europe, China whose population will rise by the end of the next ten years to the staggering total of 800 million people. And then thirdly, those parts of the world whose people are at present uncommitted either to Communism or to our Western ideas.

And in this context we think first of Asia and then of Africa. As I see it the great issue in this second half of the twentieth century, is whether the uncommitted peoples of Asia and Africa will swing to the East or to the West. Will they be drawn into the Communist camp? Or will the great experiments in self-government that are now being made in Asia and Africa, especially within the Commonwealth, prove so successful, and by their example so compelling, that the balance will come down in favour of freedom and order and justice?

The struggle is joined, and it is a struggle for the minds of men. What is now on trial is much more than our military strength or our diplomatic and administrative skill. It is our way of life. The uncommitted nations want to see before they choose.

What we can show them to help them choose right? Sir, each of the independent members of the Commonwealth must answer that question for itself. It is a basic principle of our modern Commonwealth that we respect each other's sovereignty in matters of internal policy. At the same time we must recognise that in this shrinking world in which we live today the internal policies of one nation may have effects outside it. So we may sometimes be tempted to say 'mind your own business', in these days I would expand the old saying so that it says: 'Mind your own business, but mind how it affects my business, too'.

If I may be very frank with you, my friends. What Governments and Parliaments in the United Kingdom have done since the war in according independence to India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Malaya and Ghana, and what they will do for Nigeria and other countries now nearing independence, all this, although we must take and do take full and sole responsibility for it, we do in the belief that it is the only way to establish the future of the Commonwealth and of the Free World on sound foundations. All this of course is of deep and

close concern to you for nothing we do in this small world can be done in a corner and remain hidden.

What we do today in West, Central and East Africa becomes known to everyone in South Africa, whatever his language, colour or traditions. Let me Sir assure you, and all those here assembled, and all who may be listening, in all friendliness, that we are well aware of this, that we have acted and will act with full knowledge of the responsibility we have to you and to all our friends.

Nevertheless I am sure you will agree that in our own areas of responsibility we must each do what we think right. What we British think right derives from a long experience both of failure and success in the management of these affairs. We try to learn and apply the lessons of both. Our judgement of right and wrong and of justice is rooted in the same soil as yours — in Christianity and in the rule of law as the basis of a free society. This experience of our own explains why it has been our aim in the countries for which we have borne responsibility, not only to raise the material standards of life, but to create a society that respects the rights of individuals, a society in which men are given the opportunity to grow to their full stature — and that must in our view include the opportunity of an increasing share in political power and responsibility, a society finally in which individual merit and individual merit alone, is the criterion for a man's advancement, whether political or economic.

Finally, in countries inhabited by several different races, it has been our aim to find means by which the community can become more of a community, and fellowship fostered between its various parts. This problem Sir is by no means confined to Africa. Nor is it always a problem of a European minority. In Malaya for instance, though there are Indian and European minorities, Malays and Chinese make up the great bulk of the population and the Chinese are not much fewer in numbers than the Malays. Yet these two peoples must learn to live together in harmony and unity and the strength of Malaya as a nation will depend on the different contributions which the two races can make.

The attitude of the United Kingdom's Government towards this problem was clearly expressed by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, speaking at the United Nations General Assembly on the seventeenth of September 1959 and these were his words:

In those territories where different races or tribes live side by side the task is to ensure that all the people may enjoy security and freedom and the chance to contribute as individuals to the progress and well

being of these countries. We (that is the British) reject the idea of any inherent superiority of one race over another, our policy therefore is non-racial. It offers a future in which Africans, Europeans, Asians, the peoples of the Pacific and others with whom we are concerned, will all play their full part as citizens in the country where they live, and in which feelings of race will be submerged in loyalty to new nations.

I thought you would wish me to state plainly and with full candour the policy for which we in Britain stand. It may well be that in trying to do our duty as we see it we shall sometimes make difficulties for you. If this proves to be so we much regret it. But I know that even so you would not ask us to flinch from doing our duty and you, too, will do your duty as you see it. I am well aware of the peculiar nature of the problems with which you are faced in the Union, I know the differences between your situation and that of most of the other states in Africa. You have here three million people of European origin. This country is their home. It has been their home for hundreds of years. They have no other home. And the same is broadly true of Europeans in Central and East Africa. Of course in most other states those who have come to work from Europe have only come to work, to spend their working lives, to contribute their skills, perhaps to administer and then to go home. That is quite a different problem.

The problems to which you and all members of this Parliament must address yourselves are therefore very different from those which face the Parliaments of countries of homogenous populations. Of course I realise that these are hard, sometimes baffling problems. It would be surprising if your interpretation of your duty did not sometimes produce very different results from ours in terms of Government policies and actions.

As a fellow member of the Commonwealth we always try I think and perhaps succeeded in giving to South Africa our full support and encouragement, but I hope you won't mind my saying frankly that there are some aspects of your policies which make it impossible for us to do this without being false to our own deep convictions about the political destinies of free men to which in our own territories we are trying to give effect. I think therefore that we ought, as friends, to face together, without seeking I trust to apportion credit or blame, the fact that in the world of the day, today, this difference of outlook lies between us.

I said that I was speaking as a friend. I can perhaps almost claim to be speak as a relation, for we Scots can claim family connections with both the great European sections of your people, not only with the English-speaking people but with the Afrikaans-speaking. This is a point which hardly needs emphasis

in Cape Town where you can see every day the statue of that great Scotsman Andrew Murray. His work in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape, and the work of his son in the Orange Free State, was among the Afrikaans-speaking people. There always has been a very close connection between the Church of Scotland and the Church of the Netherlands. The Synod of Dort plays the same great part in the history of each. And many aspirants to the Ministry of Scotland, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, went to pursue their theological studies in the Netherlands. I think Scotland can claim to have repaid its debt to South Africa. I am thinking particularly of the Scots in the Orange Free State. Not only the younger Andrew Murray, but also the Robertsons, the Frasers, the McDonalds — families which have been called the Free State clans, who became burghers of the old Free State and whose descendants still play their part there.

But though I count myself a Scot, my mother was an American, and the United States provides a valuable illustration of one of the main points which I have been trying to make today. The population of America, like yours, is a blend of many different strains, and over the years most of those who have gone to North America have gone there in order to escape conditions in Europe which they found intolerable. The Pilgrim Fathers were escaping from persecution as Puritans, the Marylanders from persecution as Roman Catholics. And throughout the nineteenth century a stream of immigrants flowed across the Atlantic from the old world to the new to escape from the poverty in their homelands, and now in the twentieth century the United States have provided asylum for the victims of political oppression in Europe.

And so for the majority of its inhabitants America has been a place of refuge, or a place to which people went because they wanted to get away from Europe. It is not surprising, therefore, that for many years the main objective of American statesmen, supported by the American public, was to isolate themselves from Europe, and with their great material strength, and the vast resources open to them, this seemed an attractive and a practicable course. Nevertheless, twice in my lifetime, in the two great wars of this fifty years, they have been unable to stand aside. Twice their manpower in arms has streamed back across the Atlantic to shed its blood in those European struggles from which their ancestors thought they could escape by emigrating to the New World; and when the Second War was over, they were forced to recognise that in the small world of today, isolationism is out of date and more than that, offers no assurance of security.

The fact is that in this modern world no country, not even the greatest, can live for itself alone. Nearly two thousand years ago, at a time when you might say that the whole of the civilised world was comprised within the confines of

the Roman Empire, St. Paul proclaimed one of the great truths of history — we are all members one of another. During this twentieth century that eternal truth has taken on a new and exciting significance. It has always been impossible for the individual man to live in isolation from his fellows, in the home, the tribe, the village, or the city. Today it is impossible for nations to live in isolation from one another. What Dr. John Donne said of individual men three hundred years ago is true today of my country, of your country, and all the countries of the world:

Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind.
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.¹

All nations are now interdependent one upon another, and this is generally realised throughout the Western World. I hope in due course the countries of Communism will recognise it too. It was certainly with that thought in mind that I took the decision to visit Moscow about this time last year. Russia has been isolationist in her time and still has tendencies that way, but the fact remains that we must live in the same world with Russia, and we must find a way of doing so. I believe that the initiative which we took last year has had some success, although grave difficulties may lie ahead. Nevertheless I think nothing but good can come out of its extending contacts between individuals, contacts in trade and through the exchange of visitors.

I certainly do not believe in refusing to trade with people because you may happen to dislike the way they manage their internal affairs at home. Boycotts will never get you anywhere, and may I say in parenthesis how I deprecate the attempts that are being made today in Britain to organise a consumer boycott of South African goods. It has never been the practice, so far as I know, of any Government of the United Kingdom of whatever complexion to undertake or support campaigns of this kind designed to influence the internal politics of another Commonwealth country. I and my colleagues in the United Kingdom deplore this proposed boycott and regard it as undesirable from every point of view. It can only have serious effects on Commonwealth relations and trade, and lead to the ultimate detriment of others than those against whom it is aimed.

I said I was speaking of the interdependency of nations. The members of the Commonwealth feel particularly strongly the value of interdependence. They are as independent as any nation in this shrinking world can be, but they have voluntarily agreed to work together. They recognise that there may be and

¹ From *Meditation XVII*, better known as the poem "For whom the bell tolls" (or "No man is an island") (editor's note).

must be differences in their institutions; in their internal policies, and membership does not imply the wish to express a judgement on these matters, or the need to impose a stifling uniformity. It is, I think, a help that there has never been question of any rigid constitution for the Commonwealth. Perhaps this is because we in the United Kingdom have seemed to have got on alright for several hundreds of years without a written constitution and are rather suspicious of such things. But whether that is so or not, it is clear that a rigid constitutional framework for the Commonwealth would not work, its not that kind of thing. That at the first of the stresses and strains which are inevitable in this period of history, cracks would appear in this rigid framework and then the whole structure, in my view, would crumble. It is the flexibility of our Commonwealth institutions which gives them their strength.

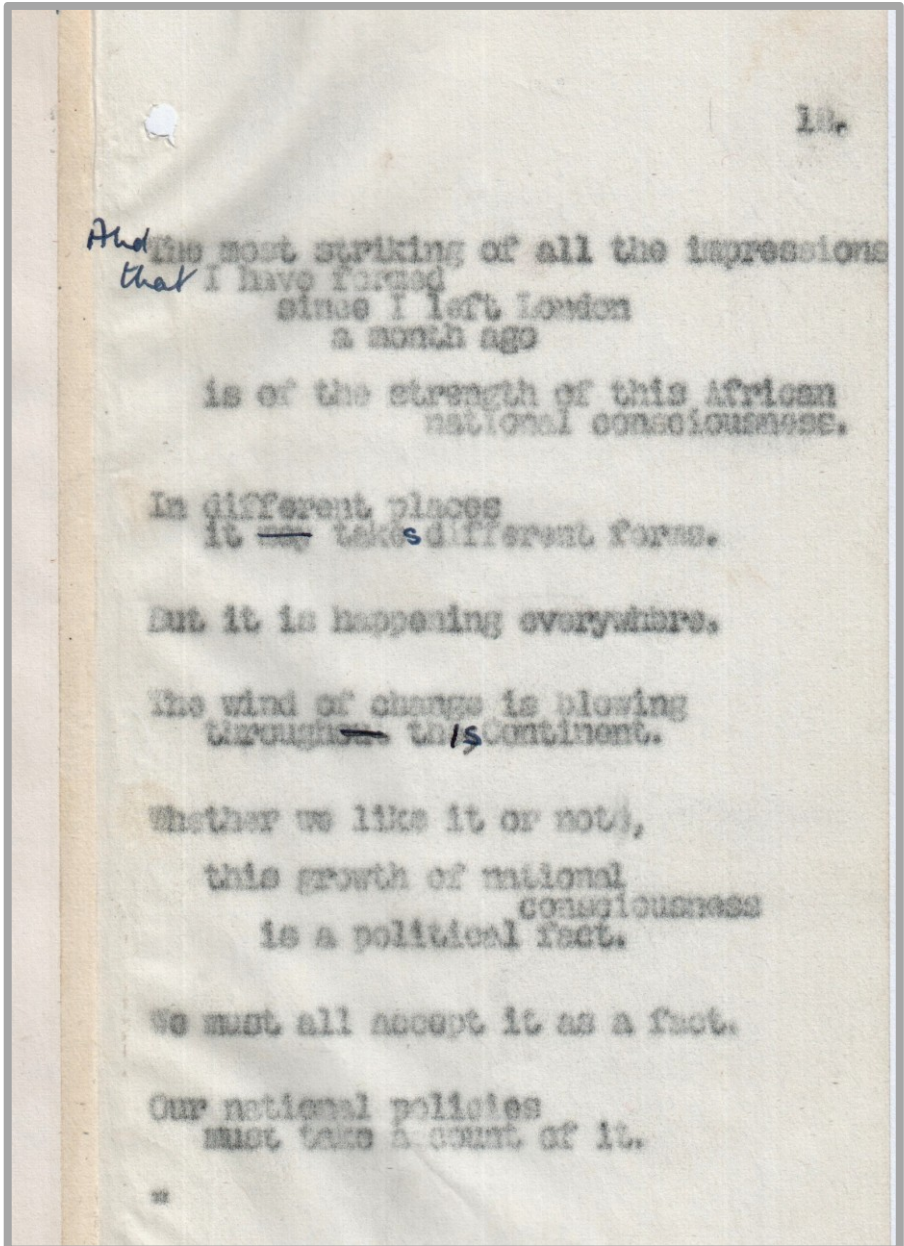
Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, I fear I have kept you a long time. I much welcome the opportunity to speak to this great audience, this carries such great responsibilities. In conclusion may I just say this? I have spoken frankly about the difficulties between our two countries, the differences between our two countries, in their approach to one of the great current problems with which each has to deal within its own sphere of responsibility. These differences are well-known. They are matters of public knowledge, indeed of public controversy. I would have been less than honest if by remaining silent on them I had seemed to imply that they did not exist. But differences on this subject, or one subject, important as it is, need not and could not, should not, impair our capacity to co-operate with one another in furthering the many practical interests which we share in common. The independent members of the Commonwealth do not always agree on every subject. It is not a condition of their association that they should do so. On the contrary, the strength of our Commonwealth lies largely in the fact that it is a free association of free and independent states, each responsible for ordering its own affairs but co-operating in the pursuit of common aims and purposes in world affairs. Moreover, these differences may be transitory. In time they may be resolved. Our duty is to see them in this perspective, in perspective, against the background of our long association. Of this at any rate I am certain — those of us who by the grace or favour of the electors are temporarily in charge of affairs in your country and in mine, we fleeting transient phantoms of the great stage of history, we have no right to sweep aside on this account the friendship that exists between our countries, that is the legacy of history. It is not ours alone to deal with. To adapt a famous phrase, it belongs to those who are living, it belongs to those who are dead and to those who are yet unborn. We must face the differences, but let us try to see a little beyond them down the long vista of the future. I hope — indeed, I am confident — in another fifty years we shall look back on

~ Harold Macmillan ~

the differences that exist between us now as mere matters of historical interest, for as time passes and one generation yields to another, human problems change and fade. Let us remember these truths. Let us therefore resolve to build and not to destroy, and let us also remember that weakness comes from division, and in words familiar to you, strength from unity.



Introduced by Ph.-J. Salazar and transcribed by Brett Syndercombe.



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