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EDITORIAL

BRITISH COMMONWEALTH

Seeing the Queen recently on television delivering her Christmas message and hearing her talking about her so beloved British Commonwealth makes you realise how far removed these people are from reality.

When, out of the old British Empire, they created the British Commonwealth, it was never meant to be, in the eyes of the British, a community of countries with equal rights. Although the name had changed, the British still considered the countries of the Commonwealth as the

servants with the British at the top as the masters. The name British Commonwealth gave the people and especially the politicians in Great Britain the feeling that they could still hold onto something resembling the old Empire.

But the British Commonwealth was already moribund when it was renamed so and it has died a hundred times since. Nobody believes in it anymore except the Queen and a large number of politicians with their heads in the clouds. In reality the countries of the Commonwealth have drifted so far apart, economically and politically, that nothing holds them together anymore. In fact, it is easier today

to deal with countries outside the Commonwealth than with countries within.

Try to set up some business deal in Gambia or just obtain a simple entry visa for Ghana and you will find that these are sheer impossibilities and yet both these countries, just like New Zealand, belong to the British Commonwealth. To illustrate the point take the various visa costs applicable to enter India for example: New Zealanders pay NZ\$7.50 for a visa, (the Swiss NZ\$15.00) but the British pay NZ\$52.00 whilst the Finns and the Danes get it for free. New Zealanders who want to settle in the UK must pay a hefty fee of NZ\$150.00 whilst the French, for centuries Great Britain's arch rivals, can now enter and work in the UK at will without any formalities at all.

It is easier for the Swiss to travel to any Commonwealth country than for New Zealanders, or even the British themselves, to circulate within their own so called community of nations. It is ridiculous that rather than promote trade and facilitate relationships amongst its own community, the countries of the British Commonwealth have, over the years, erected more and more barriers against one another to the point of almost curtailing any normal communications between themselves. A further stupidity is when heads of states of two of these countries meet, each proclaims that the people he represents are the greatest friends of the other country and vice-versa. These heads of states must either be completely double-faced or they are totally unaware of what is happening in reality. They may just about be the only two people who are allowed to visit one another's country without a visa. For the rest of us every bureaucratic chicanery is thrown at us, from endless form filling to exorbitant visa fees to try to discourage anyone from visiting the other country. How on earth can you be friends with people you have never seen, who hide behind bureaucratic

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barriers, who have a totally different way of life and, in brief, absolutely nothing in common with you.

Strike a conversation with any New Zealander about Sierra Leone (another British Commonwealth country) and you meet with a blank stare. Most New Zealanders have probably never heard of the place, they would not have a clue where it is, let alone know the name of its capital. For all it matters, these commonwealth countries could just as well be on a different planet.

The close relationship between Australia and New Zealand would have eventuated just the same even if neither country had been a member of the Commonwealth, because it is a logical and natural relationship.

So to all intents and purposes, the British Commonwealth is now only a figment of imagination in the minds of a few politicians, but for the average person it has been long dead. And the sooner our politicians realise that, the better. For outsiders such as us Swiss, the British Commonwealth is an anachronism which has no place anymore in this modern world where relationships between countries are based on economical survival and not anymore on old out-dated imperialistic ideals.

NEWS FROM THE EMBASSY

NEW SWISS "BUNDESPRÄSIDENT" FOR 1994

On December 8, 1993, the Swiss Government elected **OTTO STICH** as the new "Bundespräsident" for the year 1994. He obtained 167 votes (absolute majority 111 votes). **Kaspar VILLIGER** received 24 votes and **Ruth DREIFUSS** 23. But then Kaspar VILLIGER went on to be elected vice-president by 198 votes with Ruth DREIFUSS getting 17 votes.

SWISS FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 90'S AND NEUTRALITY:

Two reports from the Swiss Government.

The Swiss Government recently submitted to Parliament a report on foreign policy in the 90's and a report on neutrality.

In the foreign policy report, the Government puts forward the concept of a Swiss foreign policy taking into account the changes occurring in the international environment since the beginning of the decade. It formulates its global strategy: it is participation in international decisions which more and more shapes Switzerland's future, thus better affirming her sovereignty. The needs and aspirations of Switzerland define the national interests, which have to be served by foreign policy, in harmony with the internal policy. The Government is therefore resolved to im-

prove the relationship between citizens and foreign policy.

Participation in the European construction is part of the foreign policy priorities of Switzerland. This policy follows the conviction that only a united Europe, strong and open to the world, can face the challenges of the 21st century. The new parameters of the international environment make integration into Europe an important stage which will permit Switzerland to reinforce her universal relations and to pursue the defence of her interests on a global scale.

In its report, the Government shows the contribution that foreign policy can bring to the upholding and promotion of security, to the growth of community prosperity and to the preservation of the natural environment. It retains amongst its principal policy objectives two main values inherent in Swiss society, democracy and social cohesion. It also determines to promote these values through the country's external relations.

With respect to these objectives, the Government is analysing the facilities at Switzerland's disposal, and those she will have to add to better defend her interests. In consequence, it established three priorities:

- Raising of the insufficient level of Swiss participation in international decisions, with the goal of adhering to the European Union and the United Nations, and the strengthening of the institutions of which Switzerland is already a member;

- Developing ways and means in which Switzerland can act in maintaining peace and preventing conflicts, supporting, in particular, the most underprivileged countries and the promotion of Swiss economic interests abroad;

- Defining principal guidelines to be followed: promotion of an open international economy with sustainable development, defence of human rights and of democratic institutions, respect of international law and generalization of peaceful settlement of disputes, protection of the victims of war and support of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), control of armament, disarmament and non-proliferation, and finally, extension of Switzerland's capacity to contribute to the settlement of global questions, in particular in the area of the fight against poverty and of protection of the environment.

In the report on neutrality attached to the report on foreign policy, the Government reaffirms the validity of neutrality strongly emphasizing, however, that international cooperation is an increasingly important factor of security. It mentions particularly the contributions to international security which a neutral state must be capable of supplying. The Government acknowledges that, member or not of the European Union, it is in Switzerland's own interest, for solidarity and her own security, to participate in the measures aimed at promoting stability and peace in Europe.

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