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Laurence Cros

► **To cite this version:**

Laurence Cros. A New Canada in a New Commonwealth : Multiculturalism and International Representation. Cahiers Charles V, 2010, 49 (1), pp.75-93. 10.3406/cchav.2010.1567 . hal-02909634

HAL Id: hal-02909634

<https://hal.science/hal-02909634>

Submitted on 19 Dec 2021

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Citer ce document / Cite this document :

Cros Laurence. A New Canada in a New Commonwealth : Multiculturalism and International Representation. In: Cahiers Charles V, n°49,2010. Le Commonwealth des nations en mutation: décolonisations, globalisation et gouvernance. pp. 75-93;

doi : <https://doi.org/10.3406/cchav.2010.1567>

https://www.persee.fr/doc/cchav_0184-1025_2010_num_49_1_1567

Fichier pdf généré le 13/09/2019

Résumé

Le Canada, ancienne colonie britannique et voisin de la superpuissance américaine, a toujours été préoccupé par la définition de son identité nationale, et la volonté de la faire connaître au monde. L'engagement du Canada dans le Commonwealth correspond à une définition de l'identité canadienne à la fois traditionnelle et contemporaine. Au départ, elle était liée à l'identité avant tout britannique du premier des dominions de l'empire ; puis, cette identité a commencé à évoluer vers le modèle multiculturel qui est à présent caractéristique du Canada. Cet article montre que cette redéfinition de l'identité nationale canadienne s'est faite en parallèle de l'évolution du Commonwealth des Nations. Nous examinerons deux moments précis qui illustrent cette double évolution du Canada et du Commonwealth : la relation entre le Canada et l'Inde au tournant des années 1950, et la relation avec l'Afrique du Sud en 1961 et 1971. Ces moments historiques révèlent que le Canada a joué un rôle important pour aider le Commonwealth à s'affirmer comme organisation multiraciale, évolution qui était parallèle à celle du Canada vers le multiculturalisme.

Abstract

Canada, as a former colony of the British empire and a next door neighbour of the American super power, has always been preoccupied with defining its specific identity and making it known to the world. Canada's involvement in the Commonwealth corresponds to both a traditional and a modern definition of Canadian identity. At first it corresponded to a Canadian identity which was defined mainly by its British dimension and its status as the senior dominion in the empire. But as time passed, Canada turned towards the multicultural definition of its identity which has now become its hallmark. This article shows that this redefinition of Canada's national identity closely accompanied the evolution of the Commonwealth of Nations. Two moments in time which reflect this parallel evolution will be closely examined : the relationship between Canada and India in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the role played by Canada in relation to South Africa in 1961 and 1971. These historical moments will show that Canada played an important role in helping the Commonwealth to emerge as a multiracial organization, an evolution which was consistent with Canada's own evolution towards multiculturalism.

A NEW CANADA IN A NEW COMMONWEALTH: MULTICULTURALISM AND INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATION

LAURENCE CROS*

As a Canadian diplomat recently said, foreign policy is an exercise in branding. One consequence is that Canada's image in the world must fit, and hopefully strengthen, the national identity Canadians are building at home. I will elaborate on this idea by arguing that Canada's interaction with the Commonwealth was guided by internal factors and self-interest. One of these factors was the growing diversity of the country; the other was the desire to find a counterweight to American influence. In the past, American influence in Canada had been held in check by British power. But it was clear after the Second World War that this was no longer working, and the decline of British power was crucial in pushing Canada to increase its involvement in multilateral organizations, among which is the Commonwealth. On the other hand, Canada's growing diversity, and its shift from an identity which tried to promote itself as British to the now dominant concept of multiculturalism, closely paralleled the Commonwealth's evolution from a white-only¹ to a multiracial organization. While the concept of multiculturalism was also adopted by other Commonwealth countries, Canada was the true pioneer of multiculturalism, the first country in the Western world whose thinkers came up

* Université Paris Diderot, Sorbonne Paris Cité, EA 4214 LARCA (Laboratoire de Recherches sur les Cultures Anglophones)

¹ Although the settlement colonies that made up the British Commonwealth before the Second World War included indigenous peoples, they were considered "white" nations.

with theories of multiculturalism, and whose government adopted an official policy of multiculturalism in the early 1970s.

Therefore it seems that at several moments in the recent history of the Commonwealth, Canada played a useful role as a facilitator which mediated between the new characteristics of the modern Commonwealth and the old partners. This article will examine these moments to show how Canada interacted with its partners to facilitate the emergence of a new Commonwealth.

1947-1954: Canada and India

During this period, Britishness was still a fundamental facet of Canadian identity. William Lyon Mackenzie King, whose career as Prime Minister ended in November 1948, had always keenly defended Canada's autonomy, but there is no doubt about his passionate commitment to Britain. In the same way, Lester Pearson, who was Secretary of State for External Affairs from 1948 to 1957, was characterized by the kind of Britishness that historian W. L. Morton defined in 1964 as "a local brew which we called Canadian" (Morton 257). Pearson, like many among the Canadian elite, had been educated at Oxford, which he left with a new sense of his equality, along with a reinforced Anglophilia (Champion, 2007, 264-265). John English, Pearson's biographer, commented on Pearson's attitude at the 1949 conference that transformed the British Commonwealth into the Commonwealth of Nations: "He had been surprisingly taciturn [...] Silence, perhaps, did not mean so much consent as acceptance of a new world where the verities of his childhood—imperial anthems, Kipling's stories, and Ed Pearson's loyal sermons—were passing as if in a dream." (English 27)

In the Commonwealth, Britishness provided a common ground not only between the old dominions, but also with

India and Pakistan. Commonwealth statesmen, even non-whites like Nehru, shared common British political values that helped them to meet comfortably. Nehru, who had been educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, was an Oxbridge British gentleman, like Pearson. They also shared an interest and sympathy for the British left. Much in Nehru seemed familiar to Pearson, who wrote of him that he “was one of the most subtle and difficult men whom I had ever met, an extraordinary combination of an Hindu god, and an Eton-Oxbridge type of Englishman” (English 37).

Pearson was not blind to the differences that lay beneath Nehru’s—and India’s—surface layer of Britishness. However, Canadians were perhaps better prepared than other members of the Commonwealth to deal with these differences and see them as assets. If Pearson was a British Canadian, the Canadian Prime Minister, Louis Saint Laurent, was a French Canadian. The existence of the French Canadians had always made it impossible to define Canada solely as British and therefore Canada’s British identity had never been monolithic. By the 1920s, Canadian thinkers were beginning to praise this dual dimension of the country. They rejected John Stuart Mill’s definition of a nation-state based on identity of race and community of language and religion. They rather relied on Lord Acton’s definition of the ideal nationality as heterogeneous and ethnically diverse, because such a state is, by necessity, forced to compromise and therefore less likely to become intolerant (Kennedy 17). In Canadian foreign policy, finding a common ground by the two “races”, as they were still called in the interwar period, had always been a key preoccupation, especially for the Liberal Party. The guiding principle of Mackenzie King’s foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s had been to avoid antagonizing the French Canadians, and this was one of the key reasons why Mackenzie King had always resisted attempts to make the British Commonwealth more centralized. Preserving harmony between the two groups

to defend national unity remained a central principle of Canadian foreign policy in 1947, and it was reiterated in Prime Minister Saint Laurent's speech defining Canadian foreign policy (Mackenzie, 2007, 462). This does not mean that, in 1947, Canada was a multicultural country in the modern sense. Its policies were still characterized by racial discrimination against Asians (including Indians and Pakistani) whose immigration was severely restricted until 1962. Canadians of Asian origins had only limited citizenship rights, especially in British Columbia until 1947-48. Nonetheless, even then, Canada's dual cultural heritage and the old custom of brokering between conflicting interests and views predisposed Canadians to accept the growing diversity of the Commonwealth.

To Canada, India and the rest of the new Commonwealth were familiar because of shared British heritage, as well as unfamiliar, as representatives of a diverse world which Canadians were only just discovering. Canadians were able to deal with both aspects of the relationship: shared political values inherited from the British parliamentary tradition made it easy to trust India and other Commonwealth countries, while, on the other hand, Canada's long experience of accommodating diversity, or at least duality, at home made them comfortable with the idea of a more diverse Commonwealth. Thus both the shared Britishness and the acceptance of diversity facilitated Canada's strong interaction with India in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Canada was quick to support India's admission to the Commonwealth despite its intention to become a republic. This was a key moment because the admission of India, Pakistan and Ceylon signalled the transformation of the Commonwealth into a multiracial organization. Canada played a special part in helping the British find a solution to the constitutional issue (Mackenzie, 1999, 84 and McKenzie 560). This was because among the old Dominions, Canada had historically favoured a decentralized Commonwealth,

while Australia and New Zealand were far more insistent on monarchical ties. Pearson was the first to suggest that a simple declaration of intent and of shared interests might be enough for membership in the Commonwealth. At first this was dismissed by Britain as lacking “a formal basis for association”, but in the end, it was one of the two elements used in the April 1949 conference as foundations for India and Pakistan’s memberships, with recognition of the King as the head of the Commonwealth (Mackenzie, 1999, 86-89).

Canada’s experience with diversity at home and its long-held preference for a decentralized Commonwealth explain why it actively collaborated in the transformation of the Commonwealth. It even seems that it was Mackenzie King who first suggested to Nehru that the name “British Commonwealth” should be changed to “Commonwealth of Nations” (Mackenzie, 1999, 89). But another reason for Canada’s attitude was political realism: India should not be left to drift into the Soviet orbit (Mackenzie, 1999, 88-89), not only for itself but also because it was the ideal “bridge between the east and the west”, as Pearson said in 1949 (Bothwell 77).

Collaboration between India and Canada increased during and after the Korean War. In 1952, Escott Reid, one of the senior Canadian diplomats, was sent to New Delhi as high commissioner. The shared liberal values inherited from Britain meant that Canada was ready to trust India and use it as a link to communicate with communist China. This was something the Americans, who saw little difference between Nehru and the Soviets, found hard to understand (Bothwell 123). On the other hand, Nehru trusted Pearson and Reid and used them as intermediaries between India and the West (English 86). As a result, Canada and India worked closely together in the United Nations in 1952-53 to find a compromise during the last stages of the Korean War and in 1954, both countries were appointed to the International Commission for Supervision

and Control in Vietnam. As John English, Pearson's biographer, wrote, "1954 was the glorious summer of Indo-Canadian harmony" (English 92-94). This cooperation with India differentiated the Canadian from the American position and gave Canada some welcome breathing space in its relationship with the United States. Canadians were prompt to see that collaboration with India, and more generally with a diverse Commonwealth, could help to balance the overwhelming influence of American power and culture on Canada and the world (English 40-41).

The first South African crisis, 1961

Another key topic for the renewal of the Commonwealth and Canada's role in it was the question of South Africa between 1961 and 1971. The racist policy of South Africa had long been an issue both in the United Nations and the Commonwealth, but until 1961 none of the Western powers took a clear stand against it. South Africa was considered too important an economic and military partner in the multilateral systems of the Cold War era, such as the Commonwealth, the United Nations, the Bretton-Woods system, and the North-Atlantic / Commonwealth military alliance. Both in the Commonwealth and the United Nations, there was a strong convention of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states (Henshaw 5-6).

The issue came to a head when South Africa became a republic, and applied for readmission to the Commonwealth during the March 1961 conference in London. It was obvious that the non-white members of the Commonwealth would oppose the re-admission of South Africa (Hillmer 252). When Britain proposed the automatic re-accession of South Africa and was supported by New Zealand and Australia (Bothwell 143), Canada's position was central. It was ambiguous at first. John Diefenbaker, the Canadian Prime Minister, was clearly

opposed to apartheid, but he was also sensitive to the British argument that keeping South Africa in the Commonwealth was the best way to convince it to adopt a more liberal policy. Diefenbaker had worked hard at the previous conference to convince South Africa to make some concessions (Hillmer 252-253). He tried again to find a compromise in 1961 by proposing a declaration of principle that would accept South Africa's application while condemning apartheid. But it proved impossible to reconcile the positions of South Africa and of the most radical Commonwealth members, such as Nigeria, Ghana and India. In the end, Canada sided with the latter, which caused South Africa to withdraw its application (Harnetty 39-40). Canada's role was pivotal because it was the only white member to side with the Asian and African members; being opposed by a white member was the key factor behind South Africa's withdrawal of its application, and it spared the Commonwealth a white/non-white split which would have severely weakened the multiracial foundation of the new Commonwealth.

Why did Canada adopt this position? In 1961 it did not yet define itself as a multicultural country: the immigration of Asians and Africans was still restricted and until very recently, Canadians of Asian origins had had limited citizenship rights. This had long been a strong deterrent to articulating Canadian criticism of apartheid (Harnetty 37 and Henshaw 32): these elements, as well as Canada's "treatment towards the Red Indians as well as her contempt for the rights of the Eskimos" were used by South Africa to discredit Canada's stand at the 1961 Commonwealth Conference (Harnetty 41). Yet Canada was slowly redefining itself to promote acceptance of diversity and equality. In July 1960, all native Canadians were enfranchised (Harnetty 42). In August 1960, Parliament passed a Bill of Rights "for the recognition and protection of human rights [...] without discrimination for reasons of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex" (Harnetty 3). In 1962, changes

in immigration policy made immigration easier for Asians and Africans. Generally speaking, Canadians felt a strong antipathy to apartheid, and this key internal factor influenced Diefenbaker's stand (Bothwell 143). Canada was going in the same direction as the Commonwealth—towards greater recognition of multiracial and multicultural realities. Moreover, while Canada did not yet define itself as a multicultural country, it nonetheless saw itself as a country untouched by the sin of colonialism. Canadians tended to take “pride in Canada's approach to the Third World as less rigid and confrontational than that of the old colonial powers, preoccupied with self justification and self-interest, or the United States, obsessed with anti-communist ideology” (Bothwell 298). Canada saw itself as a moral power and aimed at promoting this flattering self-image in the world, in a way which not only South Africa, but also Britain, denounced as “holier-than-thou” (Harnetty 42). This Canadian approach was obviously incompatible with supporting the presence of an apartheid South Africa in the Commonwealth (Bothwell 148).

It is clear that Canada's position was motivated by realism as well as idealism. By the 1960s, African countries and their problems were becoming important not only in the Commonwealth, but also in the United Nations. In the United States, the civil rights movement was gaining momentum. Preserving the credibility of the Commonwealth as a multi-racial organization in the highly explosive world of the Cold War was therefore very important. Indeed some officials within the Canadian Department of External Affairs had been arguing this since the early 1950s. Against those who maintained that for strategic reasons, the West could not afford to alienate South Africa, two memoranda from the Commonwealth Division of the Canadian Department of External Affairs in 1951 argued that even on “purely strategic grounds,” the support, or at least the “friendly neutrality” of the “coloured half of the world” was “desirable and necessary,

perhaps even more desirable and necessary than South Africa's support if we are to create and preserve a preponderance of force against the Soviet Union" (Henshaw 20). Ten years later, in the changing world created by decolonisation, and with a domestic situation which was slowly changing to accommodate the growing diversity of the country, it was becoming urgent for Canada to act on this observation. Canadians realized that in both the United Nations and the Commonwealth, Western powers were becoming increasingly and dangerously isolated by their reluctance to condemn apartheid (Henshaw 26-27).

Diefenbaker had always been strongly committed to individual rights and his accession to power made it possible to revise Canadian policy. As early as 1952, he had taken a strong stand in Parliament against racial discrimination, warning that it was time that "the Commonwealth, with five to one of those who are members [...] being of coloured races, should do everything possible to assure freedom from discrimination" (Henshaw 28). As a result, Diefenbaker became the cabinet's leading proponent of a strong stand against apartheid. The minutes of Cabinet meetings in February 1961 show that the Prime Minister developed several arguments to justify his position: the Canadian government had to uphold its reputation as the champion of individual rights and freedoms; African and Asian countries had to be kept in the Commonwealth, not least because this would help to stop the spread of communism; a strong stand against South Africa was needed to hold the Commonwealth together; and finally, the Canadian public "would not favour a compromise on a fundamental issue of human rights, merely in order to retain the membership of that country" (Henshaw 33-34).

Diefenbaker's position combined idealism and realism, internal and external factors. Canada perceived itself as a protector of human rights and this self-image had to be pro-

moted in the international arena. African countries accepted this view of Canada, in part because they did not equate Canada with the old imperial powers of Europe or the new imperial power of the United States, and Canada therefore enjoyed a privileged relation with the African members of the Commonwealth. As a result, it was in a position both to ensure the survival of the Commonwealth as a multiracial, equal association dedicated to democracy, and to contribute to the stability of the free world.

The second South African crisis, 1971

Ten years later, in 1971, the South Africa question caused another major crisis within the Commonwealth, a crisis in which Canada, under Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, played its familiar role of “honest broker”. Trudeau was at first uninterested in the Commonwealth, which he equated with an irrelevant imperial past, with meetings still held in London, chaired by the British Prime Minister, and Britain occupying two seats at the table by contrast to other members’ single seats. Trudeau was impatient with the ceremonial in London and he showed this by doing his famous pirouette behind the Queen’s back at the 1969 conference. He determined to change all this: “Long before that first meeting was over Trudeau resolved that basic changes were necessary if the immense potential of this grouping was to be realized” (Head and Trudeau 97). Soon, however, he began to appreciate it as a forum for honest and private discussion with many Third World leaders and when his progressive proposal to rotate venues received widespread support, he declined the proposal for Ottawa to host the next meeting, for fear of perpetuating an unhealthy hierarchy in the Commonwealth (Head and Trudeau 100).

South Africa was the key issue of the Singapore Conference in January 1971. The context was difficult: African leaders

were still smarting from the British refusal to deal firmly with Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence of November 1965. Insult had been added to injury in the summer of 1970 when the new Conservative government of Edward Heath announced its intention of going ahead with an agreement to supply military equipment to South Africa—a practice which had been suspended by the Labour government of Harold Wilson. As a result, in the months before the conference, the African members, led by Tanzania, had warned that they would withdraw from the Commonwealth if Britain went on offering assistance to their enemy (Head and Trudeau 99-107).

Canada's role as a facilitator between the two sides took two stages. First, before the conference, Ivan Head, Trudeau's advisor for foreign affairs, was sent to key African countries to persuade them to come to Singapore. Head then discovered that Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda had drafted a 'declaration of principles' that condemned apartheid and he was asked by Tanzania's President, Julius Nyerere, whether Canada would support it at the conference. It was only when Canada committed itself to supporting the declaration that the two African leaders agreed to come to Singapore at all. In addition, Head was able to give the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, advance notice that the declaration would be presented at the conference.

Second, during the conference Canada played a central role in brokering a compromise between the two sides, to prevent resignations from the Commonwealth by either Britain or key African nations (Bothwell 305-306). While African nations demanded support from white members, as a symbol of the white world's willingness to repair historical injustices, Britain was reluctant to agree, for fear of offending South Africa, a key economic and military partner. Trudeau convinced both sides to agree to a reworded version of the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles that stated:

We recognise racial prejudice as a dangerous sickness threatening the healthy development of the human race and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil of society. Each of us will vigorously combat this evil within our own nation. No country will afford to regimes which practice racial discrimination assistance which in its own judgment directly contributes to the pursuit or consolidation of this evil policy.
(The Commonwealth at the Summit 156)

As Trudeau later explained, the key words were “its own judgement” because they gave Britain the necessary manoeuvring room to continue its military cooperation with South Africa (Head and Trudeau 114). Trudeau’s central role was underlined at the conference’s close when Chairman Lee Kuan Yew paid credit to his “outstanding contribution”: “Mr. Trudeau, of Caucasian stock [...] had felt that the stature of man himself would be diminished if Commonwealth countries were to treat their fellow humans the way white South African were doing” (Head and Trudeau 114).

Ten years after South Africa’s withdrawal from the Commonwealth, Canada had again played an important part in keeping the multiracial Commonwealth together and reaffirming its commitment to equality and human rights. This does not mean that the fight against apartheid was over; indeed it took Canada itself another six years to introduce trade sanctions against South Africa. Yet it seems clear that Canada’s role at the Singapore meeting was consistent with its ongoing transformation into a multicultural country. By the mid-1960s, Canada had changed its immigration laws to rescind discrimination on the basis of race or country of origin. In 1969, Parliament passed the Official Languages Act that made Canada officially bilingual. In 1971, Trudeau’s government promulgated the “Announcement of Implementation of Policy of Multiculturalism within Bilingual Framework”, the precursor of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988. The domestic context made it constantly necessary for

the Trudeau government to advertise its full commitment to the respect of diversity and equality. One key issue that Trudeau faced in the 1970s was the Quebec sovereigntist movement; many Quebecois saw themselves as a colonized nation fighting for equality against a dictatorial federal state and the rhetoric of decolonization was often used in the fight against Canada, both by the moderates and by the more extreme movements like the *Front de Libération du Québec* (FLQ). Just before the Commonwealth conference in Singapore, in October 1970, Trudeau's popularity plummeted when he suspended civil rights and imposed martial law in Quebec, following the kidnapping by the FLQ of British trade commissioner James Cross and Quebec Minister of Labour Pierre Laporte (who was later executed). At the same time, First Nations activism increased following the publication of a White Paper on Indian Policy by the Trudeau government in June 1969, which recommended that Native Canadians should at long last be made equal to other Canadian citizens. The government planned to relinquish Indian lands, while removing the Indians' special status, dismantling the Department of Indian Affairs, and giving the provinces responsibility for services to Indian peoples. The reaction of the First Nations was overwhelmingly negative: the National Indian Brotherhood (the name was changed to the Assembly of the First Nations in 1982) claimed that First Nations wanted self-government, not the assimilation that becoming ordinary citizens of provinces implied. As Canada's first peoples, they claimed that they had a right to assert their cultures so long suppressed by the government and the churches. They perceived the White Paper as a policy of cultural genocide, and the Trudeau government hastily withdrew its proposal.

Ironically, the 1970s was a time when Canada, so smugly certain only a decade before that it had never been tainted by the sin of colonialism that plagued Europe, was discovering that some groups in Canada were actually fighting against

what they saw as insufferable colonial treatment at the hands of the federal government. Needless to say, some countries were prompt to seize on Canada's domestic troubles. While commenting on Canada's decision to impose trade sanctions on South Africa in 1977, South African foreign minister Pik Botha did not fail to mention Canada's iniquitous treatment of its indigenous people, and its difficulties with Quebec (CBC Interview). No wonder then that the Trudeau government felt obliged to promote the Canadian model of tolerant diversity not only at home but around the world.

On the home front, Trudeau's fight against Quebecois separatism and his efforts to implement a multiculturalist model in Canada were promoted through an intense intellectual production on the nation and nationalism. Thinkers in Canada, particularly historians, came up with the notion of "limited identities", i.e. the possibility that Canadian citizens should define themselves through diverse experiences of region, class and culture (Careless, 1987, 6). In addition, they took up the reflection of their predecessors of the 1920s and rejected the ethnic model of the nation in favour of the heterogeneous and ethnically diverse Actonian model. There was an obvious convergence between the concept of "limited identities" and the Actonian model, which transformed the multiplicity of identities available to the Canadian citizens from a weakness into an asset. In a world that was more and more transnational and global, it turned Canada into a model, as one Canadian historian wrote in 1969: "We are a highly pluralistic society in a bi-national union. That is our problem, our weakness, our distinction and reason to exist" (Careless, 1969, 26). Trudeau himself, as well as Ramsay Cook, one of the most prolific Canadian historians on the subject of the evils of ethnic nationalism, relied on the Actonian model and supported the views of Elie Kedourie, whose seminal book, *Nationalism*, was published in 1960. Both Trudeau and Cook were vocal in their rejection of both English- and French-

Canadian nationalisms and promoted the idea that “the value of Canada is, or at least could be, its non-nationalist, pluralistic character” (Cook 196). In the international arena too, Canada’s foreign policy had to proclaim the country’s attachment to racial equality and the benefits of diversity. It must actually have been refreshing for Trudeau, decried at home as a tyrant bent on containing the national aspirations of a colonized people (the Quebecois), as well as assimilating indigenous people (the First Nations), to be hailed as their best support by the leaders of recently decolonized African nations. And we can imagine that Trudeau’s role in Singapore went a long way towards moderating criticism of his policy at home.

It seems clear that at several key moments in the recent history of the Commonwealth, Canada played a pivotal role in facilitating the emergence, and then the continuation of a multiracial Commonwealth of Nations based on the principles of majority law and equality. Nor can it be doubted that Canada’s foreign policy in the Commonwealth of Nations was consistent with the country’s genuine commitment to human rights and democracy. It was also, nonetheless, a useful exercise in public relations. By acting as it did in the Commonwealth, Canada was promoting a certain image of itself not only to the world, but also to its own people². This image was that of a country committed to tolerance, equality, and pluralism. The Commonwealth of Nations was a forum ideally suited to this exercise because it was going through a similar evolution, from an identity which used to define itself as British to an identity which was becoming more and more

² As Will Kymlycka has argued, one characteristic of Canada today is that it defines itself as multicultural *and* makes a number of efforts to promote comprehension of “the Canadian model” abroad; one reason, he argues, is that selling Canada to foreigners can help to sell it to Canadians (Kymlicka 830-831).

diverse, multicultural, and multiracial. In short, Canada and the Commonwealth were going in the same direction; by fighting to defend the new Commonwealth, Canada was strengthening its new multicultural identity, both in the eyes of its own people and in the eyes of the world. By proving itself the right model to accommodate diversity, not only at home but also in the Commonwealth, Canada's foreign policy helped to defuse criticism from reluctant Canadians like the Québécois and the First Nations.

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Résumé

Le Canada, ancienne colonie britannique et voisin de la super-puissance américaine, a toujours été préoccupé par la définition de son identité nationale, et la volonté de la faire connaître au monde. L'engagement du Canada dans le Commonwealth correspond à une définition de l'identité canadienne à la fois traditionnelle et contemporaine. Au départ, elle était liée à l'identité avant tout britannique du premier des dominions de l'empire ; puis, cette identité a commencé à évoluer vers le modèle multiculturel qui est à présent caractéristique du Canada. Cet article montre que cette redéfinition de l'identité nationale canadienne s'est faite en parallèle de l'évolution du Commonwealth des Nations. Nous examinerons deux moments précis qui illustrent cette double évolution du Canada et du Commonwealth : la relation entre le Canada et l'Inde au tournant des années 1950, et la relation avec l'Afrique du Sud en 1961 et 1971. Ces moments historiques révèlent que le Canada a joué un rôle important pour aider le Commonwealth à s'affirmer comme organisation multiraciale, évolution qui était parallèle à celle du Canada vers le multiculturalisme.

Abstract

Canada, as a former colony of the British empire and a next door neighbour of the American super power, has always been preoccupied with defining its specific identity and making it known to the world. Canada's involvement in the Commonwealth corresponds to both a traditional and a modern definition of Canadian identity. At first it corresponded to a Canadian identity which was defined mainly by its British dimension and its status as the senior dominion in the empire. But as time passed, Canada turned towards the multicultural definition of its identity which has now become its hallmark. This article shows that this redefinition of Canada's national identity closely accompanied the evolution of the Commonwealth of Nations. Two moments in time which reflect this parallel evolution will be closely examined: the relationship between Canada and India in the late 1940s and early 1950s and the role played by Canada in relation to South Africa in 1961 and 1971. These historical moments will show that Canada played an important role in helping the Commonwealth to emerge as a multiracial organization, an evolution which was consistent with Canada's own evolution towards multiculturalism.