The commonwealth of Nations:
From Empire Management
to the Challenges of the 21st century
Mme Roiron

I- The Commonwealth in the making (1776-1971)

A) Looking for a new way of managing the Empire
1- From Boston to Ottawa: Transforming an American failure into an American success for the Empire
   The lessons drawn from the independence of the US: the emergence of a more informal conception of the empire
   Consequences for settlement colonies: the Durham report on Canada (1839) and the pragmatic emergence of “Dominion status”

2- The formalisation of the Empire in non settlement territories
   The doctrine of trusteeship – the Indian mutiny (1857) – The Berlin conference (1885) – the scramble for Africa

B) Transforming the Empire into a “British Commonwealth of Nations”

1- From the colonial conferences to the Statute of Westminster
   Attempts at unifying the self-governing empire (from the 1887 colonial conference to the experience of the war Cabinet)
   The Irish issue – the Balfour report – the Statute of Westminster

2- Cracks in the colonial Empire: a new British imperial policy?
   The imperial policy in the non-settlement colonies – towards an extension of the Dominion status to the whole empire?
   The impact of WW2: the end of the ideal of a British-centred imperial community

C) Institutionalising the Commonwealth

1- The birth of the “modern” Commonwealth
   Ireland, Burma, India, three visions of the Commonwealth
   The 1949 London Declaration – the British King as Head of the Commonwealth

2- The Commonwealth: Britain’s tool or a fully fledged international organisation?
The institutionalisation of the Commonwealth – the creation of the Secretariat General (1965)
Britain's entry into the EEC

3- The Commonwealth in search of a new role
   Ministers' conferences of 1966 and 1969
   The way forward: The Singapore declaration (1971)

II- The Commonwealth as an empowering force?

A) A bridge between the North and the South
1- Commonwealth multilateral co-operation: the Commonwealth as a capacity builder
   From the Colombo Plan (1951) to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (1971)
   The CFTC today
   The co-ordinating role of the Secretariat General (organisation of the Secretariat, the
   Commonwealth Youth Programme)
2- “Helping the world to negotiate”: the Commonwealth as an enabler
   The role of the Secretary General – Giving poorer countries a chance to be heard in international
   forums and economic negotiations
   Promoting understanding and co-operation at the summit: the CHOGMs
3- The Commonwealth of peoples: transnational actions
   The Commonwealth Foundation – the “unofficial Commonwealth” – focus on the civil society

B) Defending human rights and democratic principles
1- Ending racial discrimination in Southern Africa
   The outcome of the Rhodesian crisis – The end of apartheid in South Africa
2- The post-Cold War era and the defence of democratic principles
   The Harare Declaration (1991) – the CMAG
   New conditions for membership – From the admission of Mozambique (1995) to that of Rwanda
   (2009)
   Promoting sustainable development

C) Risk and development: the Commonwealth's perspective about small states
1- A growing concern
   A majority of Commonwealth members – the Nassau CHOGM (1985) – a specific definition in
   terms of vulnerability
2- A specific Commonwealth issue?
   Commonwealth assistance for small states – Commonwealth advocacy at international level - a
   multi-faceted approach in terms of economic and political development
   Building the economic resilience of small states as a new priority for the Commonwealth?

Conclusion: "The Commonwealth @ 60", an assessment
Selected bibliography


Mansergh N., *The Commonwealth Experience*, University of Toronto Press, 1982 (2nd edition)


