The Commonwealth of Nations: From Empire Management to Postcolonial Policies

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

The way forward: The Singapore declaration (1971)
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 Commonwealth 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)


Description:
The object of this course is to inquire into the development of the Commonwealth of Nations from an association within the British Empire into an independent international organisation. The Commonwealth of Nations, first called the British Commonwealth, was a key instrument in the British decolonisation process as it was created and used by British Governments to frame the decolonisation of the empire. After the decolonisation of Africa at the beginning of the 1960s, the Commonwealth had to work out objectives for itself and find a new role on the international scene. This transitional period was crucial in the history of the Commonwealth as it witnessed the institutionalisation of the once imperial association of former colonies into a truly international organisation dedicated to the promotion of development for the least wealthy member-states, especially small states. From 1990 on, in addition to its economic commitments, the Commonwealth began to focus on the promotion of political values. The study of the institutionalisation of the Commonwealth also raises questions on the future relations between Britain and the former colonies. Indeed, what was at stake in this process was the working out of a new kind of relationship, based on equality, between the former coloniser and former colonised, which involved that all member-states had to rethink their own position and identity to look forward and give the Commonwealth a new lease of life in a postcolonial world.

Le Commonwealth des Nations : de la gestion de l’empire aux politiques postcoloniales

Description :