

(SHRI ALLADI KRISHNASWAMI AYYAR, MAY 17, 1949)

For a growing country like India, to remain in the Commonwealth without any commitments of any kind will be an advantage in the interests of peace and the future good relations of the world.

Mr. President, Sir, I have to congratulate, if I may, the Honourable the Prime Minister for having solved a most knotty problem, a problem which was regarded as somewhat insoluble in certain quarters some months ago. The resolution which we are asked to affirm, does not in any way detract from the position which the Constituent Assembly has taken up from the outset. India is to be a Sovereign Independent Republic, both in her internal affairs and external relations. The Crown will have no place whatever either in the internal relations or in the external relations. The President of the Union will represent India both in the internal spheres and in external relations. We do not require any credentials either by or in the name of the British Crown for transacting our business with foreign countries. In matters of war, in peace, in trade relations, we will be masters of our household. There will be no economic entanglements of any kind. So far as the Dominions are concerned, both India and the Dominions are at arms length. India will be entitled to pursue a foreign policy which is suited to the best interests of India. The only point that is urged against the acceptance of the Agreement is that there is no reason why the first Part of the Statute of Westminster should be embodied in the Declaration, namely, that the Crown is to be the symbol of the free association of the Members of the British Commonwealth. The second part of the Declaration, found in the preamble to Statute of Westminster viz., the part dealing with allegiance to the Crown has been advisedly omitted. Therefore the only link is that of the King being the symbol of the free association of the members of the Commonwealth of Nations. If there is to be a symbol, it will be very difficult to fit in the President of the Union into the framework. It is not a feasible idea to have alternatively, say, the Prime Ministers of England and the Dominions and the President of India as the heads of the association. As the Crown still continues to be the head of other Dominions, and as we are entering into a kind of voluntary association the King as the symbol, is perpetuated. But it is necessary to note that it is nothing more than a symbol. The Crown will have no functions, no duties and no rights *vis-a-vis* the various Units of the Commonwealth. That is the position of the Crown.

Now therefore, are there any radical objections to this scheme that has been adopted is the one question before us. In regard to this point, what I would like to invite the attention of the House to is that this association has not even any resemblance to the Atlantic Pact or the UNO. At least in regard to the UNO, though the sovereignty of the different Units is in terms declared in the UNO, taking the various parts of the UNO you may come to the conclusion that to some extent there are provisions which detract from the sovereignty of the individual members of the UNO.

Similarly, there is no question of our involving ourselves in any alliances like the Atlantic Pact, because there are no commitments either in regard to defence or in regard to war or other matters. Therefore it is the least onerous task that has been undertaken by our Prime Minister. The republican status of India is in no way affected at all in the external sphere or in the internal sphere and the position of the President will in no way be affected. In fact the Declaration is silent on this point. Supposing the King of England visits India, he will not get any kind of priority or precedence over our President. Our President would be the representative of India and the King of England will have no sort of precedence over him in spite of the fact that he may be the link of the Commonwealth of Nations within the limits of India or in any other place. In other places, including the Dominions and England, the President will have the rank of an independent sovereign.

Then the only question that has been sometimes debated is, 'Why not we stand aloof altogether? Why not we take up the position which Ireland has taken?' The one point which we have to remember in this connection is that Ireland may be in a position to get all the advantages of citizenship everywhere having regard to the fact that her kith and kin are scattered over Canada, Australia and America and they will be in a position to cement the relationship between the Dominions and America. You can easily understand why they are willing to give the go-by to all ideas of citizenship so far as an Irish citizen is concerned even in England. Therefore it is necessary to exactly appreciate the position of Ireland. First, Ireland is a very small country very near Great Britain; and secondly, Irishmen are scattered all over the Dominions. Therefore they will be in a position to get all the advantages of the contact and can have the best of both the worlds without being members of the Commonwealth of Nations. That explains the real position of Ireland and it also to some extent satisfies the sentiments of the Irish people. We will have to consider our own position, not in the setting of what Ireland has done or may do, but in the setting of what is in the best interests of our own country. Though it may not be germane for the purpose of understanding this Resolution, you will have to take into account various factors such as the Army organisation under the existing relations, the various conditions which have to be established in the matter of capital importation and so on. For these purposes a certain degree of contact or perpetuation of contact in an effective form will be an advantage to this country.

These are matters which I have no doubt must have weighed with the Honourable the Prime Minister in coming to this Agreement without in any way sacrificing the independence, the dignity, and the constitutional position of India as per the terms of the Constitution.

One other point which you may take note of is that without the alteration of a comma or putting in any kind of prefix this Constitution can go through without the mention of the Crown in any part of it. The Preamble will be there. Necessary changes may be made to fit in the different parts of the Constitution with the preamble. But the crown will come nowhere in any part of this Constitutional structure. It is a very loose association which has some advantages. Nobody, no country in the present day can live in what may be called splendid isolation. It is one thing to become the slave of another nation and become a victim of its economic policy and it is quite another thing to maintain one's individuality. It is said that if you sever your constitutional relations altogether, there will be independence. That is wrong. It all depends upon the strength which you develop. Look at China. She was for a very long time theoretically independent and had to depend upon other countries. Similarly, our country may be theoretically independent with no connection with Britain or the British Crown. But until you develop your own strength you will be subject to control by other nations. Therefore, the only way in which to approach the problem is to see that there is nothing in the way of developing our strength and if we so desire to break off at any time we choose. If, for example, Britain does not conduct herself properly it will be quite open to the next Government or the next Parliament which will be elected on universal suffrage to snap the tie. Therefore it is a question of expediency. I cannot understand the argument on the one side that it means nothing and on the other side that it means everything. You have no right to read between the lines when the Prime Minister makes an open declaration. You will have to take him at his word. There is no reason why, having regard to our knowledge of our Prime Minister, you should think that he has entered into any kind of understanding with somebody else. The understanding is there in the declaration. Are you or are you not willing to abide by the Declaration?

Another point was put forward, viz., that this question should have first been ratified. I have never heard it said that before you enter into a pact with other nations you must discuss with others the minute details of that pact. In the past the whole scheme was adumbrated before this house on several occasions. The Congress had agreed to support in principle this alliance or union, it does not matter what you call it. Having done that, to say that every comma, every semi-colon and every sentence of this agreement should be placed before this House before it is entered into is meaningless. The Prime Minister goes there and he carries out in letter and in spirit the mandate of this House and the Congress, and he now comes back and asks you to ratify it. What is wrong in this procedure? Does it conflict with the international procedure adopted by any civilised country in the world? This is a point which I cannot understand. I have never heard it said that all the details of an

agreement must be discussed before a Parliament or a Constituent Assembly, that every clause of it should be discussed and approved, and then the other parties to the agreement should either accept it or reject it. The one point that you have to consider is whether the Prime Minister has in any way deviated from the instructions given to him by the Congress or the Constituent Assembly.

Now, I am also quite clear on this point that so far as India is concerned, there is no commitment of any kind. It is entitled to pursue its own foreign policy, domestic policy or industrial policy. Even as a Dominion India is having an independent line of her own without reference to the other Dominions at times even at cross purposes with England, the latter having remained neutral on difficult occasions when she found that she could not side with one or the other. Even her neutrality is an advantage to us. For example, whenever there is a conflict between one member of the Commonwealth and ourselves, her neutrality will be an advantage to us. The point to note is that we have no commitment to enter into any power bloc. India is the one country which has no kind of commitments. Under those circumstances, I think to have friends with whom you can discuss things without any commitments is a great advantage, unless you want to live in isolation in the complicated world of the present day. When really there are no commitments, any criticism of the decision is merely legalistic, unless the critics want that there should be commitments. Does Professor Shah want that there should be commitments? Do the other people who indulged in a caveat against the agreement want commitments? If you want, then those commitments will have to be bilateral. You cannot have unilateral commitments. Therefore that argument is rather contradictory. On the one side you do not want to enter into any bloc and you do not want to have any commitments. If you want to derive tangible concrete advantages from any particular group of people, then you must be willing to yield to the other side. Even in the economic sphere it is wrong to think that you can be independent only if you stand aloof from other nations. Take America. America is able to dominate the other nations of the world. Is it because she has entered into compacts with those nations? It is because she has got money, she has got wealth, she has got immense resources, she is able to dominate the whole world. Look at the independent nations of Europe. Is it because they are not independent they are being dominated? They are independent republics in every sense of the term, but yet they are being dominated. For a growing country like India to remain in the Commonwealth without any commitments of any kind will be an advantage in the interests of peace and the future good relations of the world, and I do not think there can be any better exponent of world peace than our Prime Minister. I have no doubt whatsoever that if he finds that there are any entanglements under the cover of this free association, with the King as the symbol of that association he will be the first one to advise you to scrap that association. Under these circumstances, let us not be afraid of meeting another person because he is going to swallow you. That means you are timid; you have no confidence in yourself.

If you have confidence in yourself, in this compact you will be able to assert your individuality. Under these circumstances, having regard to the considerations I have set out, we should accord an enthusiastic and unanimous support to the agreement reached by our Prime Minister. He has shown himself to be taller—even though he may be short physically—than all the other Ministers from the different parts of the Commonwealth as a result of this Conference. He has achieved what we have fought for and at the same time he has preserved our continued relationship with the Commonwealth.