

(SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, MAY 16, 1949)

In the world today where there are so many disruptive forces at work, where we are often at the verge of war, I think it is not a safe thing to encourage to break up any association that one has. Break up the evil parts of this; break up anything that may come in the way of your growth, because nobody dare agree to anything which comes in the way of a nation's growth. Otherwise, apart from breaking the evil parts of the association, it is better to keep a co-operative association going which may do good in this world rather than break it.

Mr. President, Sir, I have the honour to move the following motion:

Resolved that the Assembly do hereby ratify the declaration, agreed to by the Prime Minister of India, on the continued membership of India in the Commonwealth of Nations, as set out in the official statement issued at the conclusion of the Conference of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London on April 27, 1949.

All honourable Members, have been supplied with copies of this Declaration†

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† "The Governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon, whose countries are united as Members of the British Commonwealth of Nations and owe a common allegiance to the Crown, which is also the symbol of their free association, have considered the impending constitutional changes in India.

The Government of India have informed the other Governments of the Commonwealth of the intention of the Indian people that under the new constitution which is about to be adopted India shall become a sovereign independent Republic. The Government of India have however declared and affirmed India's desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of nations and her acceptance of the King as the symbol of the free association of its Independent member nations and as such as the Head of the Commonwealth.

The Governments of the other countries of the Commonwealth, the basis of whose membership of the Commonwealth is not hereby changed, accept and recognise India's continuing membership in accordance with the terms of this Declaration.

Accordingly the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon hereby declare that they remain united as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations, freely co-operating in the pursuit of peace, liberty and progress."

and so I shall not read it over again. I shall merely point out very briefly some salient features of this Declaration. It is a short and simple document in four paragraphs. The first paragraph, it will be noticed, deals with the present position in law. It refers to the British Commonwealth of Nations and to the fact that the people in this Commonwealth owe a common allegiance to the Crown. That in law is the present position.

The next paragraph of this Declaration states that the Government of India have informed the Governments of the other Commonwealth countries that India is soon going to be a sovereign independent Republic; further that they desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations, accepting the King as a symbol of the free association, etc.

The third paragraph says that the other Commonwealth countries accept this and the fourth paragraph ends by saying that all these countries remain united as free and equal members of the Commonwealth of Nations. You will notice that while in the first paragraph that is referred to as the British Commonwealth of Nations, in the subsequent paragraphs that is referred to only as the Commonwealth of Nations. Further you will notice that while in the first paragraph there is the question of allegiance to the Crown which exists at present, later of course this question does not arise because India becoming a Republic goes outside the Crown area completely. There is reference, in connection with the Commonwealth, to the King as the symbol of that association. Observe that the reference is to the King and not to the Crown. It is a small matter but it has certain small significance. But the point is this, that so far as the Republic of India is concerned, her constitution and her working are concerned, she has nothing to do with any external authority, with any King, and none of her subjects owe any allegiance to the King or any other external authority. That Republic may however agree to associate itself with certain other countries that happen to be monarchies or whatever they choose to be. This Declaration therefore states that this new Republic of India, completely sovereign and owing no allegiance to the King, as the other Commonwealth countries do owe, will nevertheless be a full member of this Commonwealth and it agrees that as a symbol of this free partnership or association rather, the King will be recognised as such.

Now, I am placing this Declaration before this honourable House for their approval. Beyond this approval, there is no question of any law being framed in accordance with it. There is no law behind the Commonwealth. It has not even the formality which normally accompanies treaties. It is an agreement by free will, to be terminated by free will. Therefore, there will be no further legislation or law if this House approves of this. In this particular Declaration nothing very much is said about the position of the King except that he will be a symbol, but it has been made perfectly clear—it was made perfectly clear—that the King has no functions at all. He has a certain status. The Commonwealth itself, as such, is no body, if I may say so; it has no organisation to function and the King also can have no functions.

Now, some consequences flow from this. Apart from certain friendly approaches to each other, apart from a desire to co-operate, which will always be conditioned by each party deciding on the measure of co-operation and following its own policy, there is no obligation. There is hardly any obligation in the nature of commitments that flow. But an attempt has been made to produce something which is entirely novel, and I can very well understand lawyers on the one hand feeling somewhat uncomfortable at a thing for which they can find no precedent or parallel. There may also be others feeling that behind this there might be something which they cannot quite understand, something risky, something dangerous, because the thing is so simple on the face of it. That kind of difficulty may arise in people's minds. What I have stated elsewhere I should like to repeat that there is absolutely nothing behind this except what is placed before this House.

One or two matters I may clear up, which are not mentioned in this Declaration. One of these, as I have said, is that the King has no functions at all. This was cleared up in the course of our proceedings; it has no doubt been recorded in the minutes of the Conference in London. Another point was that one of the objects of this kind of Commonwealth association is now to create a status which is something between being completely foreign and being of one nationality. Obviously the Commonwealth countries belong to different nations. There are different nationalities. Normally either you have a common nationality or you are foreign. There is no intermediate stage. Up till now in this Commonwealth or the British Commonwealth of Nations, there was a binding link, which was allegiance to the King. With that link, therefore, in a sense there was common nationality in a broad way. That snaps, that ends when we become a Republic, and if we should desire to give a certain preference or a certain privilege to any one of these countries, we would normally be precluded from doing so because of what is called the "most favoured nation clause" that every country would be as much foreign as any other country. Now, we want to take away that foreignness, keeping in our own hands what, if any, privileges or preferences we can give to another country. That is a matter entirely for two countries to decide by treaty or arrangement, so that we create a new state of affairs—or we try to create it—that the other countries, although in a sense foreign, are nevertheless not completely foreign. I do not quite know how we shall proceed to deal with this matter at a later stage. That is for the House to decide—that is to say, to take the right, only the right, to deal with Commonwealth countries, should we so choose, in regard to certain preferences or privileges. What they are to be, all that, of course, we shall in each case be the judge ourselves. Apart from these facts there has nothing been decided in secret or otherwise which has not been put before the public.

The House will remember that there was some talk at one stage of a Commonwealth citizenship. Now it was difficult to understand what the contents of a Commonwealth citizenship might be, except that it meant that they were not completely foreign to one another. That un-foreignness remains, but I think it is as well that we left off talking about something vague,

which could not be surely defined, but the other fact remains, as I have just stated : the fact that we should take the right to ourselves, if we so chose to exercise it at any time, to enter into treaties or arrangements with Commonwealth countries assuring certain mutual privileges and preferences.

I have briefly placed before this House this document. It is a simple document and yet the House is fully aware that it is a highly important document or rather what it contains is of great and historical significance. I went some weeks ago as the representative of India to this Conference. I had consulted my colleagues here, of course previously, because it was a great responsibility and no man is big enough to shoulder that responsibility by himself when the future of India is at stake. During the past many months we had often consulted each other, consulted great and representative organizations, consulted many Members of this House. Nevertheless when I went, I carried this great responsibility and I felt the burden of it. I had able colleagues to advise me, but I was the sole representative of India and in a sense that future of India for the moment was in my keeping. I was alone in that sense and yet not quite alone because, as I travelled through the air and as I sat there at that Conference table, the ghosts of many yesterdays of my life surrounded me and brought up picture after picture before me, sentinels and guardians keeping watch over me, telling me perhaps not to trip and not to forget them. I remembered, as many honourable Members might remember, that day nineteen years ago when we took a pledge on the bank of the River Ravi, at the midnight hour and I remembered the 26th of January the first time and that oft-repeated Pledge year after year in spite of difficulty and obstruction, and finally, I remembered that day when standing at this very place, I placed a resolution before this House. That was one of the earliest resolutions placed before this honourable House a Resolution that is known as the Objectives Resolution. Two years and five months have elapsed since that happened. In that Resolution we defined more or less the type of free Government or Republic that we were going to have. Later in another place and on a famous occasion, this subject also came up, that was at the Jaipur Session of the Congress, because not only my mind, but many minds were struggling with this problem, trying to find a way out that was in keeping with the honour and dignity and independence of India, and yet also in keeping with the changing world and with the facts as they were, something that would advance the cause of India, would help us, something that would advance the cause of peace in the world, and yet something which would be strictly and absolutely true to every single pledge that we have taken. It was clear to me that whatever the advantages might be of any association with the Commonwealth or with any other group, no single advantage, however great, could be purchased by a single iota of our pledges being given up, because no country can make progress by playing fast and loose with the principles which it has declared. So, during these months we have thought and we had discussed amongst ourselves and I carried all this advice with me. May I read to you, perhaps just to refresh your minds, the Resolution passed at the Jaipur Session of the

**Congress? It might be of interest to you and I would beg of you to consider the very wording of this Resolution :**

**In view of the attainment of complete independence and the establishment of the Republic of India which will symbolise with Independence and give to India the status among the nations of the world that is her rightful due, her present association with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Nations will necessarily have to change. India, however, desires to maintain all such links with other countries as do not come in the way of her freedom of action and independence and the Congress would welcome her free association with the independent nations of the Commonwealth for their common weal and the promotion of world peace.**

**You will observe that the last few lines of this Resolution are almost identical with the lines of the Declaration of London.**

**I went there guided and controlled by all our past pledges, ultimately guided and controlled by the Resolution of this honourable House, by the Objectives Resolution and all that has subsequently happened; also by the mandate given to me by the All-India Congress Committee in that Resolution, and I stand before you to say with all humility that I have fulfilled that mandate to the letter. All of us have been during these past many years through the valley of the Shadow; we have passed our lives in opposition, in struggle and sometimes in failure and sometimes success and most of us are hunted by those dreams and visions of old days and those hopes that filled us and the frustrations that often followed those hopes; yet we have seen that even out of that prickly thorn of frustration and despair, we have been able to pick out the rose of fulfilment.**

**Let us not be led away by considering the situation in terms of events which are no longer here. You will see in the resolution of the Congress that I have read out, it says that necessarily because India becomes a Republic, the association of India with the Commonwealth must change. Of course. Further it says that free association may continue subject only to our complete freedom being assured. Now, that is exactly what has been tried to be done in this Declaration of London. I ask you or any honourable Member to point out in what way the freedom, the independence of India has been limited in the slightest. I do not think it has been. In fact, the greatest stress has been laid not only on the independence of India, but on the independence of each individual nation in the Commonwealth.**

**I am asked often, how can you join a Commonwealth in which there is racial discrimination, in which there are other things happening to which we object? That, I think, is a fair question and it is a matter which necessarily must cause us some trouble in our thinking. Nevertheless it is a question which does not really arise. That is to say, when we have entered into an alliance with a nation or a group of nations, it does not mean that we accept their other**

policies, etc.; it does not mean that we commit ourselves in any way to something that they may do. In fact, this House knows that we are carrying on at the present moment a struggle, or our countrymen are carrying on a struggle in regard to racial discrimination in various parts of the world.

This House knows that in the last few years one of the major questions before the United Nations, at the instance of India, has been the position of Indians in South Africa. May I, if the House will permit me, for a moment refer to an event which took place yesterday, that is, the passing of the resolution at the General Assembly of the United Nations, and express my appreciation and my Government's appreciation of the way our delegation have functioned in this matter and our appreciation of all those nations of the United Nations, almost all, in fact, all barring South Africa, which finally supported this attitude of India? One of the pillars of our foreign policy, repeatedly stated, is to fight against racial discrimination, is to fight for the freedom of suppressed nationalities. Are you compromising on that issue by remaining in the Commonwealth? We have been fighting on the South African Indian issue and on other issues even though we have been thus far a dominion of the Commonwealth. It was a dangerous thing for us to bring that matter within the purview of the Commonwealth. Because, then, that very thing to which you and I object might have taken place. That is the Commonwealth might have been considered as some kind of a superior body which sometimes acts as a tribunal or judges, or in a sense supervises the activities of its member nations. That certainly would have meant a diminution in our independence and sovereignty, if we had once accepted that principle. Therefore we were not prepared and we are not prepared to treat the Commonwealth as such or even to bring disputes between member nations of the Commonwealth before the Commonwealth body. We may of course, in a friendly way discuss this matter; that is a different matter. We are anxious to maintain the position of our countrymen in other countries in the Commonwealth. So far as we are concerned, we could not bring their domestic policies in dispute there; nor can we say in regard to any country that we are not going to associate ourselves with that country because we disapprove of certain policies of that country.

I am afraid if we adopted that attitude, then, there would be hardly any association for us with any country, because we have disapproved of something or other that that country does. Sometimes, it so happens that the difference is so great that you cut off relations with that country or there is a big conflict. Some years ago, the United Nations General Assembly decided to recommend to its member States to withdraw diplomatic representatives from Spain because Spain was supposed to be a Fascist country. I am not going into the merits of the question. Sometimes, the question comes up in that way. The question has come up again and they have reversed that decision and left it to each member State to do as it likes. If you proceed in this way, take any great country or a small country; you do not agree with every thing that the Soviet Union does; therefore, why should we have representation there or why

should we have a treaty of alliance in regard to commercial or trade matters with them? You may not agree with some policies of the United States of America; therefore, you cannot have a treaty with them. That is not the way nations carry on their foreign work or any work. The first thing to realise I think in this world is that there are different ways of thinking, different ways of living and different approaches to life in different parts of the world. Most of our troubles arise by one country imposing its will and its way of living on other countries. It is true that each country cannot live in isolation, because, the world as constituted today is progressively becoming an organic whole. If one country living in isolation does something which is dangerous to the other countries, the other countries have to intervene. To give a rather obvious example, if one country allows itself to become the breeding ground of all kinds of dangerous diseases, the world will have to come in and clear it up because it cannot afford to allow this disease to spread all over the world. The only safe principle to follow is that, subject to certain limitations, each country should be allowed to live its own life in its own way.

There are at present in the world several ideologies and major conflicts flowing from these ideologies. What is right or what is wrong, we can consider at a later stage, or may be something else is right. Either you want a major conflict, a great war which might result in the victory for this nation or that, or else you allow them to live at peace in their respective territories and to carry on their way of thinking, their way of life, their structure of State, etc., allowing the facts to prove which is right ultimately. I have no doubt at all that ultimately, it will be the system that delivers the goods—the goods being the advancement and the betterment of the human race or the people of the individual countries—that will survive and no amount of theorising and no amount of warfare can make the system that does not deliver the goods survive. I refer to this because of the argument that was raised that India cannot join the Commonwealth because it disapproves of certain policies of certain Commonwealth nations. I think we should keep these two matters completely apart.

We join the Commonwealth obviously because we think it is beneficial to us and to certain **causes** in the world that we wish to advance. The other countries of the Commonwealth want us to remain there because they think it is beneficial to them. It is mutually understood that it is to the advantage of the nations in the Commonwealth and therefore they join. At the same time, it is made perfectly clear that each country is completely free to go its own way; it may be that they may go, sometimes go so far as to break away from the Commonwealth. In the world today where there are so many disruptive forces at work, where we are often at the verge of war, I think it is not a safe thing to encourage to break up any association that one has. Break up the evil parts of this; break up anything that may come in the way of your growth, because nobody dare agree to anything which comes in the way of a nation's growth. Otherwise, apart from breaking the evil parts of the association, it is better to keep a co-operative association going which may do good in this world rather than break it.

Now this Declaration that is placed before you is not a new move and yet it is a complete reorientation of something that has existed in an entirely different way. Suppose we had been cut off from England completely and we have then desired to join the Commonwealth of Nations, it would have been a new move. Suppose a new group of nations wants us to join them and we join them in this way, that would have been a new move from which various consequences would have flown. In the present instance what is happening is that a certain association has been existing for a considerable time past. A very great change came in the way of that association about a year and eight or nine months ago, from August 15, 1947. Now another major change is contemplated. Gradually the conception is changing. Yet that certain link remains in a different form. Now politically we are completely independent. Economically we are as independent as independent nations can be. Nobody can be 100 per cent independent in the sense of absolute lack of interdependence, but nevertheless India has to depend on the rest of the world for her trade, for her commerce and for many supplies that she needs, today for her food unfortunately, and so many other things. We cannot be absolutely cut off from the world. Now the House knows that inevitably during the past century and more all kinds of contacts have arisen between England and this country, many of them were bad, very bad and we have struggled throughout our lives to put an end to them. Many of them were not so bad, many of them may be good and many of them good or bad whatever they may be, are there. Here I am, the patent example of these contacts, speaking in this honourable House in the English language. No doubt we are going to change that language for our use but the fact remains that I am doing so and the fact remains that most other Members who will speak will also do so. The fact remains that we are functioning here under certain rules and regulations for which the model has been the British Constitution. Those laws existing today have been largely forged by them. Therefore we have developed these things inevitably. Gradually, laws which are good we will keep and those that are bad we will throw away. Any marked change in this without something to follow creates a hiatus which may be harmful. Largely our educational apparatus has been influenced. Largely our military apparatus has been influenced by these considerations and we have grown up naturally as something rather like the British Army. I am placing before the House certain entirely practical considerations. If we break away completely, the result is that without making sufficient provision for carrying on in a different way we have a gap period; of course if we have to pay a price, we may choose to do so. If we do not want to pay the price, we should not pay it and face the consequences.

But in the present instance we have to consider not only these minor gains, which I have mentioned to you, to us and to others but if I may say so, the larger approach to world problems. I felt as I was conferring there in London with the representatives of other Governments that I had necessarily to stick completely and absolutely to the sovereignty and independence of the Indian Republic. I could not possibly compromise on any allegiance to any foreign



authority. I did that. I also felt that in the state of the world today and in the state of India and Asia, it would be a good thing if we approached this question in a friendly spirit there which would solve the problems in Asia and elsewhere. I am afraid I am a bad bargainer. I am not used to the ways of the market place. I hope I am a good fighter and I hope I am a good friend. I am not anything in between and so when you have to bargain hard for anything, do not send me. When you want to fight, I hope I shall fight and then when you are decided about a certain thing, then you must hold to it and hold to it to the death, but about other minor things I think it is far better to gain the goodwill of the other party. It is far more precious to come to a decision in friendship and goodwill than to gain a word here and there at the cost of ill-will. So I approached this problem and may I say how I felt about others. I would like to pay a tribute to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and to others also there because they approached this in that spirit also, not so much to get some debating point or a change of a word here and there in this Declaration. It was possible that if I had tried my hardest I might have got a word here and there changed in this Declaration but the essence could not have been changed because there was nothing more for us to get out of that Declaration. I preferred not to do so because I preferred creating an impression, and I hope a right impression, that the approach of India to these and the other problems of the world was not a narrow-minded approach. It was an approach based on faith and confidence in her own strength and in her own future and therefore it was not afraid of any country coming in the way of that faith, it was not afraid of any word or phrase in any document but it was based essentially on this that if you approach another country in a friendly way, with goodwill and generosity, you will be paid back in the same coin and probably the payment will be in even larger measure. I am quite convinced that in treatment of nations to one another, as in the case of individuals, only out of goodwill will you get goodwill and no amount of intrigues and cleverness will get you good results out of evil ways. Therefore, I thought that that was an occasion not only to impress England but others also, in fact to some extent the world, because this matter that was being discussed at No. 10 Downing Street in London was something that drew the attention of the entire world. It drew the attention of the world, partly because India is a very important country, potentially so, and actually so too. And the world was interested to see how this very complicated and difficult problem which appeared insoluble, could be solved. It could not be solved if we had left it to eminent lawyers. Lawyers have their use in life; but they should not be spread out everywhere. It could not have been solved by these extreme, narrow-minded nationalists who cannot see to the right or to the left, but live in a narrow sphere of their own, and therefore forget that the world is going ahead. It could not be solved by people who live in the past and cannot realise that the present is different from the past and that the future is going to be still more different. It could not be solved by any person who lacked faith in India and in India's destiny.

I wanted the world to see that India does not lack faith in herself, and that India is prepared to co-operate even with those with whom she had been

fighting in the past; provided the basis of co-operation today is honourable that it is a free basis, a basis which would lead to the good not only of ourselves, but of the world also. That is to say, we would not deny that co-operation simply because in the past we have had a fight, and thus carry on the trail of our past "karma" along with us. We have to wash out the past with all its evil. I wanted, if I may say so in all humility, to help in letting the world look at things in a slightly different perspective, or rather try to see how vital questions can be approached and dealt with. We have seen too often in the arguments that go on in the assemblies of the world, this bitter approach, this cursing of each other, this desire not, in the least, to understand the other, but deliberately to misunderstand the other, and to make clever points about it. Now, it may be a satisfying performance for any of us, on occasions to make clever points and be applauded by our people or by some other people. But in the state of the world today, it is a poor thing for any responsible person to do, when we live on the verge of catastrophic wars, when national passions are roused, and when even a casually spoken word might make all the difference.

Some people have thought that by our joining or continuing to remain in the Commonwealth of Nations we are drifting away from our neighbours in Asia or that it has become more difficult for us to co-operate with other countries, great countries in the world. But I think it is easier for us to develop closer relations with other countries while we are in the Commonwealth than it might have been otherwise. That is rather a peculiar thing to say. Nevertheless I say it, and I have given a great deal of thought to this matter. The Commonwealth does not come in the way of our co-operation and friendship with other countries. Ultimately we shall have to decide, and ultimately the decision will depend on our own strength. If we are completely dissociated from the Commonwealth, for the moment we are completely isolated. We cannot remain completely isolated, and so inevitably by stress of circumstances, we have to incline in some direction or other. But that inclination in some direction or other will necessarily be a give-and-take affair. It may be in the nature of alliances, you give something yourself and get something in return. In other words, it may involve commitments, far more than at present. There are no commitments today. In that sense, I say we are freer today to come to friendly understandings with other countries and to play the part, if you like, of a bridge for mutual understanding between other countries. I do not wish to place this too high; nevertheless, it is no good placing it too low either. I should like you to look round at the world today and look more especially during the last two years or so, at the relative position of India and the rest of the world. I think you will find that during this period of two years or even slightly less, India has gone up in the scale of nations in its influence and in its prestige. It is a little difficult for me to tell you exactly what India has done or has not done. It would be absurd for anyone to expect that India can become the crusader for all causes in the world and bring forth results. Even in cases that have borne fruit, it is not a thing to be proclaimed from the housetops. But something which does not require any proclamation is the fact of India's present prestige and

influence in world affairs. Considering that she came on the scene as an independent nation only a year and a half or a little more ago, it is astonishing—the part that India has played today.

One thing I should like to say, and it is this. Obviously a declaration of this type, or the Resolution that I have placed before the House is not capable of amendment. It is either accepted or rejected. I am surprised to see that some honourable Members have sent notices of amendments. Any treaty with any foreign power can be accepted or rejected. It is a joint Declaration of eight, or is it nine, countries—and it cannot be amended in this House or in any House. It can be accepted or rejected. I would, therefore, beg of you to consider this business in all its aspects. First of all, make sure that it is in conformity with our old pledges, that it does violence to none. If it is proved to me that it does violence to any pledge that we have undertaken, that it limits India's freedom in any way, then I certainly shall be no party to it. Secondly, you should see whether it does good to ourselves and to the rest of the world. I think there can be little doubt that it does us good, that this continuing association at the present moment is beneficial for us, and it is beneficial in the larger sense, to certain world causes that we represent. And lastly, if I may put it in a negative way, not to have had this agreement would certainly have been detrimental to those world causes as well as to ourselves.

And finally, about the value I should like this House to attach to this Declaration and to the whole business of those talks resulting in this Declaration. It is a method, a desirable method, and a method which brings a touch of healing with it. In this world which is today sick and which has not recovered from so many wounds during the last decade or more, it is necessary that we touch upon the world problems, not with passion and prejudice and with too much repetition of what has ceased to be, but in a friendly way and with a touch of healing, and I think the chief value of this Declaration and of what preceded it was that it did bring a touch of healing in our relations with certain countries. We are in no way subordinate to them, and they are in no way subordinate to us. We shall go our way and they shall go their way. But our ways, unless something happens, will be friendly ways; at any rate, attempts will be made to understand each other to be friends with each other and to co-operate with each other. And the fact that we have begun this new type of association with a touch of healing will be good for us, good for them, and I think, good for the world.