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Patrick Gordon Walker, <i>The Commonwealth</i> , London, Secker & Warburg, 1962, pp.22-24.	Code Sujet	CCV
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The men who administered the colonies were products of the parliamentary democracy that was evolving in Britain and the countries of settlement. Their system of imperial rule was built in such a way that it could in the end make sense only if the parliamentary authority that it presupposed was exercised in the country concerned instead of in Westminster.

- 5 In the later stages of independence Britain came to work closely with the independence movements to achieve a smooth transfer of power. It was the British who had been brought round to the idea of a parliamentary democratic nation, not the other way round.

The pattern was essentially the same throughout the Commonwealth. Every member achieved independence through parliaments and the courts. In one Commonwealth country after another the British Parliament found itself face to face with its own image – a common image towards which both had been evolving. This and not the American Revolution was the prime cause of the transformation of Empire into Commonwealth. At the moment of the achievement of independence, both Parliaments were already disarmed by the affinity between them.

15 Parliamentary democracy became common to the Commonwealth not because the members borrowed their institutions from Britain, but because each country made of its own will a nation of which parliamentary democracy was an integral part. By creating genuine, autonomous parliaments, adapted to their particular constitutional needs, Britain and all the other members built a specifically Commonwealth type of democracy that moved along the same lines of development and increasingly diverged both from the United States type of democracy (with which British democracy had been closely akin in the eighteenth century) and from the democracy practised on the continent of Europe.

Models and Precedents

The transformation of Empire into Commonwealth went forward in an historically determined order.

25 The time-table arose out of the original division of the Empire into colonies of settlement and Crown Colonies: and became itself a factor in the evolution of the Commonwealth. Each further step in the process became easier, more natural, more difficult to resist.

30 The movement towards independence inevitably started first in the colonies of settlement. Their peoples carried with them the Western idea of the nation and expressed it as a matter of course through parliamentary institutions. The British Government, whilst long reluctant to see too much independence, did not attempt to set up absolute barriers to self-government, as in the Crown Colonies.

The decisive thing that turned the rise of nationalism in the colonies of settlement into the first step towards the evolution of the Commonwealth was that these people sought and achieved their nationhood within the Empire instead of outside it. The fundamental reason was that the building of these Commonwealth nations was a much more difficult task than the creation of the United States by the original relatively compact block of thirteen colonies. The smaller and more scattered colonies of settlement were beset by far more daunting obstacles in forming the first Commonwealth nations. They long needed the protection of Britain and only gradually transferred their main loyalty from Britain to their own nascent nations. Moreover the very coming into being of these nations began the transformation of the Empire into a Commonwealth that could accommodate nations that grew at a relatively slow pace.

The emergence of nations in the countries of settlement set a process in train that could not be halted. When the countries of Asia began to achieve nationhood it was taken for granted by all concerned – by Britain, by the existing members of the Commonwealth, by the new nations themselves – that the natural thing to do was to transfer power to a sovereign parliament. India was represented in the Imperial War Cabinet in 1917-18 and at the Versailles Peace Conference.

Had Britain attempted to prolong her hold on her Asian possessions, the resultant turmoil and bloodshed would have affronted the other members, who were very conscious of the virtue and force of the precedents they themselves had set. The Asian nations were influenced in their decision to continue in the Commonwealth by the fact that it contained a number of powerful and indubitably sovereign nations.

All these factors applied with greater force when the African nations and Malaya achieved independence. Commonwealth pressure in favour of independence was reinforced by the ten years old full membership of the Asian nations. Malaya, Ghana and Nigeria were influenced by the fact that the Commonwealth contained India and Pakistan.

Had it not been for this measured and cumulative march of events, the Commonwealth could not have come into being. Had Britain not had Crown Colonies, the Commonwealth would have consisted only of European nations: had Britain not had colonies of settlement that first achieved independence, precedents and models would have been lacking for relations with nationalist movements in non-European possessions.

