

1949  
NEW ZEALAND

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MEETING  
*of*  
PRIME MINISTERS,  
APRIL, 1949

Text of Final Communique Issued at the Conclusion  
of the Meeting of Prime Ministers Held at London  
from 22 to 27 April, 1949, Together with Press  
Statement by the Right Hon. P. Fraser

*London, 28 April, 1949*

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*Presented to Both Houses of the General Assembly by Leave*

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TEXT OF FINAL COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE  
CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING OF PRIME  
MINISTERS HELD AT LONDON FROM  
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DURING the past week the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, and the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs have met in London to exchange views upon the important constitutional issues arising from India's decision to adopt a republican form of constitution and her desire to continue her membership of the Commonwealth.

The discussions have been concerned with the effects of such a development upon the existing structure of the Commonwealth and the constitutional relations between its members. They have been conducted in an atmosphere of good will and mutual understanding, and have had as their historical background the traditional capacity of the Commonwealth to strengthen its unity of purpose, while adapting its organization and procedures to changing circumstances.

After full discussion the representatives of the Governments of all the Commonwealth countries have agreed that the conclusions reached should be placed on record in the following declaration :—

“ 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 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 recognize 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.”

These constitutional questions have been the sole subject of discussion at the full meetings of Prime Ministers.

London, 28 April, 1949.

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#### PRESS STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT HON. P. FRASER

The results of the Prime Ministers’ meeting just concluded mark yet another phase in the development of the British Commonwealth of Nations. It is a creditable achievement to have devised a method by which the Indian people can remain within the family of nations of the Commonwealth. There can be no doubt as to the desirability of keeping within the Commonwealth the great nation of India, with its population of 350 million people.

So far as New Zealand is concerned, we would have preferred to continue to accept the ties and form of association existing at present, but obviously conditions that are suitable to one member of the Commonwealth are not equally acceptable to others, and the Declaration which has now been agreed upon does, in fact, represent the maximum amount of agreement possible. I should like to stress particularly that the position of New Zealand so far as its allegiance to the Crown is concerned is unchanged and unimpaired. In the Declaration, the King is described as the symbol of the free association of the independent member nations of the Commonwealth, and as such, the Head of the Commonwealth. It will be noted, moreover, that His Majesty the King is recognized as Head of the Commonwealth by India as well as by the rest of us who continue to owe allegiance to the Crown.

The British Commonwealth is not and never has been a rigid structure based on statutes and treaties. It is, in fact, a free association based on common interests, common understandings, and subject to growth and change as a result of mutual adjustments. These have taken place throughout the years from the time that colonies were given responsible government and, later on, dominion status, until finally they became recognized for what they are to-day—sovereign, independent nations of the British Commonwealth. Just as the Statute of Westminster in 1931 registered changes that had occurred, so it would be true to say does the Declaration of 1949 describe the status of the Commonwealth at the present time.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep satisfaction with the good spirit which existed throughout the talks. The representatives of all the eight nations present stressed their strong desire to remain members of the Commonwealth with all that that connection means and connotes in mutual support, trust and understanding.

London, 28 April, 1949.

*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, not given ; printing (548 copies), £6.

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By Authority: R. E. OWEN, Government Printer, Wellington.—1949.  
*Price 3d.*]