

INTERIM REPORT

ON

TWENTY-EIGHTH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

BAHAMAS - OCTOBER 1982

BY

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA BRANCH DELEGATION

TWENTY-EIGHTH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
BAHAMAS

INTERIM REPORT
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA BRANCH DELEGATION

This is an interim report on the Twenty-eighth Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Nassau, the Bahamas from 11th to 23rd October 1982. A full report will be tabled when the transcript of proceedings is received from the Headquarters Secretariat of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The Commonwealth of Australia Branch delegation was:

Senator D.S. Jessop (Leader)
Mr C.J. Hurford, MP (Deputy Leader)
Senator R.N. Coleman
Mr R.A. Braithwaite, MP
Mr H.G. Chapman, MP
Mr D.E. Charles, MP
Mr D.M. Blake, Clerk of the House of Representatives (Secretary).

The Conference was hosted by the Bahamas Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. It was attended by 198 delegates, 41 secretaries, and 29 observers and 16 Members of the Executive Committee representing 116 Branches of the Association and by 8 official observers from the Association Internationale Des Parliementaires de Langue Francaise, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the National Conference of State Legislatures USA, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Society of Clerks. It was supported by 9 members of the Headquarters Secretariat, led by the Secretary-General, and 18 members of the Host Branch Secretariat led by Mr P. Saunders, Clerk of the Parliament. There were also 70 accompanying spouses.

As usual, the Association met the costs of economy class air travel and the Host Branch bore the costs of accommodation and meals, internal transport, official functions and entertainment.

Delegates and observers assembled in Nassau on 10/11 October. They were accommodated in two adjoining hotels, the Paradise Island and the Britannia Beach. Conference Sessions were conducted in the Britannia Beach Convention Centre, which had all the necessary supporting facilities and offices.

A feature of the visit to the Bahamas was a two day cruise by an ocean-going cruise ship to Freeport on Grand Bahama Island where delegates were the guests of the Grand Bahama Port Authority which operates under a Government charter.

Official functions included a Vice-regal reception at Government House, formal dinners hosted by the President of the Association the Hon. Clement Maynard, MP and the Prime Minister the Rt Hon. L.O. Pindling, PC, MP, a former President of the Association.

Informal entertainment included a tennis tournament and a golf tournament when delegates were the guests of the Paradise Island Club of the Royal Bahamian Golf Federation. Those who took part were made honorary members. It also included folk music and dances by local concert parties.

The General Conference was preceded by a Conference of Smaller Nations of the Commonwealth, which included delegates from most of the Australasian and Pacific Region, including the Northern Territory. The agenda concentrated mainly on their security, their economic viability as independent nations and their adaptation of the Westminster parliamentary system in coalescence with their traditional customs and diverse cultures.

The Commonwealth of Australia Branch delegation took this opportunity to convene meetings with the Australian State delegations and with the delegations from the Australasian and Pacific Region to discuss matters of common interest and concern, and in particular to canvass their opinion on the Branch brief for the General Assembly including those specific matters of administration, organisation and procedure which the Annual General Meeting instructed the delegation to raise. The leader and deputy leader also discussed these matters with leaders of the United Kingdom, Canadian and other Commonwealth federal delegations, particularly the case for increased Commonwealth Branch representation on the Executive Committee of the Association.

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

In a colourful ceremony in Le Cabaret (Paradise Island) the Conference was opened by H.E. the Governor-General Sir Gerald Cash, GCMG, KCVO, OBE, JP. His Excellency was introduced by the President of the Association, the Honourable Clement Maynard, Minister of Labour and Home Affairs, Bahamas. His Excellency made a rousing and stimulating speech in which the general themes were: the part that could be played by the Commonwealth as a moderating influence in the current dispute between the two super powers; the state of the world economy with particular local reference to the inter-dependency of the Americas and the rather stagnant North/South dialogue between the industrialised and the developing countries; and the

territorial threat to the smaller countries particularly Belize, Guyana, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands by the national interests and ambitions of their stronger and more powerful neighbours. He was supported by Mr Prime Minister L.O. Findling, PC, MP, who as previously mentioned, was a former President of the Association, and by Mr Speaker Mati, MP, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kenya, the present Vice-President and President (Designate) of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

THE CONFERENCE

The Agenda for the General Conference was:

World Peace and Development (Plenary)

The Security and Future of Small Countries of the Commonwealth (Plenary)

Approaches to Unemployment (Plenary)

The Freedom of the Individual, Human Rights and Responsibilities, and the Authority of Government in a Parliamentary Democracy (Plenary)

Development of Alternative Energy Resources (Panel Session)

Parliamentary Privilege with Special Reference to Confidentiality (Panel Session)

Population Control (Panel Session)

Preservation of the Environment with Special Reference to Wildlife (Panel Session)

Parliament and the Scrutiny of Public Finance (Plenary)

The Role of the Opposition in a Parliamentary System (Plenary)

Parliament and the Executive (Plenary).

The Commonwealth of Australia Branch delegation noted with some disappointment a certain sameness in the Conference agenda over the past few years. It believes that both the diversity and commonality of the Commonwealth and the CPA are reasons for broadening the scope of the agenda to encompass important issues of international concern. Nonetheless Branch delegates took part in debate on all items and in particular in a very lively session on "Unemployment" when all Commonwealth delegates spoke. Mr C.J. Hurford, MP led discussion on "The Role of the Opposition in a Parliamentary System" and Senator Ruth Coleman made the closing speech and moved the vote of thanks. It appeared to us that all Australian contributions, including our divided opinion on Unemployment, were well received. In

particular it was noted that some ten or twelve delegations asked for the transcript of Mr Hurford's opening address on the Role of the Opposition in a Parliamentary System.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The only meeting of the General Assembly was held on the second last day of the Conference proper, 21 October 1982. At the Twenty-seventh Conference in Fiji the Commonwealth of Australia Branch delegation had urged that there should be two meetings of the General Assembly at each plenary conference, the first to consider the Executive Committee's report, matters of policy and any business proposed by individual Branches, the second to consider any matters referred back to the Executive Committee and its final consolidated report. It argued that this procedure would obviate delays in implementing decisions made by the General Assembly, the governing body of the Association. The Executive Committee had recommended that any decision on the timings of meetings of the General Assembly be deferred until 1984. The delegation therefore raised this matter under consideration of the minutes of the last meeting.

The Executive Committee had also made certain other recommendations on Conference and General Assembly procedures which were contrary to the Branch brief authorised by the Annual General Meeting of the Branch, particularly in respect of CPA resolutions, the scale of representation, procedures for elections and forward estimates.

The delegation therefore prepared a paper on these matters, outlining the Branch proposals in accordance with the Branch brief, and prior to the meeting circulated it to all delegations, the Executive Committee and the Headquarters Secretariat. From private discussions with other delegations there was no doubt that there was a good deal of support for the Australian proposals and this, perhaps, prompted the Executive Committee to recommend the setting up of a Study Group "to consider and make recommendations on the CPA and the Future".

The delegation supported the recommendation but moved an amendment in specific terms incorporating the main purport and broad sense of the Branch proposals circulated in the delegation's paper. The amendment was carried: The General Assembly agreed to set up a Study Group on the CPA and the Future:

(a) Its terms of reference to include:

1. An assessment of the extent to which the Association is fulfilling its purposes and objectives;

5.

2. Annual conference arrangements: structure, financing, topics, size, duration, procedure;
3. Recent initiatives of the Association: Working Capital Fund, conference of small countries, study groups;
4. The Executive Committee: its composition, the question of regional representation, procedures for election of chairman;
5. Publications: The Parliamentarian, the CPA Newsletter, the Parliamentary Newsletter;
6. Finances.

(b) Its composition to be:

1. One representative from each Region chosen by the respective regions;
2. Three Members of the Executive Committee, including the Chairman of the Executive Committee and the Honorary Treasurer of the Association.

(c) Its working program to be:

1. The Study Group to be set up within 90 days, that is by 30 January 1983;
2. All Branches to be invited to make submissions to it by 30 April 1983;
3. It should meet in June/July 1983;
4. Its recommendations on submissions to be circulated to all Branches 90 days before the next meeting of the General Assembly;
5. Its preliminary Report to be available for discussion at the Plenary Conference in Kenya in September 1983;
6. This preliminary Report to include specific recommendations at that Conference on the issue of regional representation;
7. Its final Report to be available for the Executive Committee's meeting in March/April 1984 and sent to all Branches 90 days before the Plenary Conference in the Isle of Man in September 1984 for final consideration at that conference.

Branch Representation

The General Assembly approved the formation of new Branches in the Nigerian States of Benue and Sokoto, placed the Bangladesh and Ghana Branches in abeyance and took note of a notice of withdrawal from the Association from the Seychelles Branch.

Finance

The General Assembly approved the estimated income and expenditure account for 1982 noting that there was an estimated excess of income over expenditure of about £ 20,000 of which £ 5,000 would be transferred to the contingency reserve, leaving a credit balance of £ 26,000 to be carried forward to 1983. The General Assembly took note of the forward estimates of income and expenditure for 1983 and 1984 noting that in 1983 there would be an estimated excess of income over expenditure of about £ 5,000 which would bring the credit balance to £ 31,000 and also took note of a proposal to transfer £ 20,000 to the contingency reserve account, leaving an estimated credit balance of £ 11,000 to be carried forward to 1984. In respect of the forward estimates for 1984 the General Assembly noted an estimated excess of expenditure over income of £ 67,000, leaving an estimated debit balance at 31 December 1984 of £ 56,000 and consequently it approved a 10 per cent increase in Branch annual membership fees as from 1 January 1984.

The delegation noted that the main increases in expenditure arose from escalating costs of air fares to the venues for the meetings of the Plenary Conference and the Executive Committee, from the increasing cost of publications and the increasing costs of Headquarters administration. In respect of the first the increases for 1983 and 1984 were 18 per cent and 14 per cent respectively: the delegation appreciated that these costs are variables dependent upon the venues. In respect of the second the increase in costs was 10 per cent in 1983 and 7 per cent in 1984. In respect of the third the increase in costs was 12 per cent in 1983 and 10 per cent in 1984. The delegation therefore made the point that the forward estimates should be included in the advanced circulation of the Executive Committee so that Branches could take the professional advice of financial advisers available to them with a view to recommending economies and perhaps better financial procedures.

Reports

The General Assembly adopted the report of the Executive Committee for 1981-82, a draft of which had been circulated to all Branches prior to the Conference. It received a report on the Second Conference for Small Countries, the Bahamas, 11-12 October 1982 and agreed that there should be a

third conference concurrent with the next Plenary Conference. It also received reports on regional conferences and regional seminars including the Report on the Sixth Australasian and Pacific Parliamentary Seminar, 12-27 September 1982, which was prepared by the Regional Secretariat and presented by the Australasian and Pacific Regional Representative from Tonga.

Future Venues

The General Assembly accepted an invitation from Kenya to host the Twenty-ninth CPA Conference in Nairobi in September/October 1983 and noted a tentative offer from the Isle of Man Branch to host the 1984 conference. As directed, the Branch delegation confirmed the Australian offer to host the General Conference in 1988, Australia's Bicentenary year.

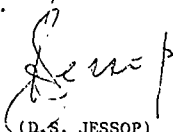
The General Assembly also accepted invitations from the Singapore, Malawi and Newfoundland Branches to host the mid year meetings of the Executive Committee in 1983, 1984 and 1985 respectively.

Election of Officers

The Honourable F.M.G. Mati, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Parliament of Kenya, was unanimously elected President of the Association. At the subsequent elections for Regional Representatives the Commonwealth of Australia Branch delegation wryly noted that the United Kingdom and the Federal Branches of Canada, India and Malaysia gained representation on the Executive Committee in continuation and the Federal Branch of Nigeria gained representation vice Sierra Leone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As indicated earlier in this report a full report will be made when the transcript of proceedings is received from the Headquarters Secretariat. In the meantime the delegation would like to acknowledge the understanding and ready co-operation of the State Branch delegates, their appreciation of the rapport with the Australasian and Pacific Regional delegations, the usefulness of the very comprehensive brief provided by the Legislative Research Service of the Parliamentary Library in association with other Executive Departments, and the generosity and camaraderie of the Bahamas Branch in organising and administering the Conference. As Leader of the Delegation, I thank the Branch for the honour it paid me and I record my personal appreciation of the friendship, support and assistance of my Parliamentary colleagues, both Commonwealth and State, during the course of the Conference.



(D.S. JESSOP)
Leader of the Delegation