

The Commonwealth of Nations : From Empire Management to the Challenges of the 21st Century

Summary

This course enquires into the evolution of the Commonwealth of Nations from an association within the British Empire and imperial management tool into an independent international organisation. The Commonwealth of Nations, first called the British Commonwealth, was a key instrument in the British decolonisation process. After the decolonisation of Africa at the beginning of the 1960s, the Commonwealth had to work out objectives for itself and find a new role on the international scene. From 1990 on, in addition to its economic commitments, the Commonwealth has focused on the promotion of common political values (democracy, human rights, good governance).

The Commonwealth of Nations is an international association of 53 states but it would be better defined as a network, as it has always put non-state actors and informal proceedings at the heart of its particular identity. With both an international and a transnational dimension, the Commonwealth offers an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of former imperial links in today's international relations, on multilateralism and the circulation of ideas, values, standards in a globalised world, and on the evolution of international relations in the 21st century, and particularly the intervention of new agencies and different forms of diplomacy.

Bibliography

- Brown J.M., Louis W.R. (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: vol. 4: the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, 2001
- Crowder M. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol 8, 1940-1975, Cambridge University Press, 1984
- Darwin J., *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988
- Hyam R., *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968*, Cambridge University Press, 2006
- Jackson A., *The British Empire, A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2013
- Judd D., *The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present*, London, Harper Collin, 1996
- Mansergh N., *The Commonwealth Experience*, University of Toronto Press, 1982 (2nd edition)
- Mayall J. (ed.), *The Contemporary Commonwealth, An Assessment, 1965-2009*, London / New-York, Routledge, 2009
- McIntyre D., *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869-1971*, University of Minnesota Press, 1977
- Moore R.J., *The Making of the New Commonwealth*, Oxford University Press, 1987
- O'Neill R. and Vincent R.J. (eds), *The West and the Third World, Essays in Honour of JDB Miller*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990
- Porter A. (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3 : *The Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, 1999
- Redonnet J.-C., *Le Commonwealth, politiques, coopération et développement anglophones*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998
- Shaw T., *Commonwealth: Inter- and Non-State Contributions to Global Governance*, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2008
- Srinivasan K., *The Rise, Decline and Future of the British Commonwealth*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005
- Torrent M., Roiron V. (dir.), *Le Commonwealth des Nations en mutation : décolonisations, globalisation et gouvernance*, Cahiers Charles V (2010:49), 2013

Outline

I- From imperial policy to international organisation (1776-1971)

1) Looking for a new way of managing the Empire (1776-1867)

- a) The American revolution and the emergence of the “liberal empire”
- b) Building the empire on new bases: the Durham Report on Canada
- c) Extending the Canadian model to other settlement territories

2) Transforming the Empire into a “British Commonwealth of Nations” (1887-1945)

- a) Unifying the self-governing empire: the ideal of a great imperial federation
- b) The impact of WW1 and of the Irish issue
- c) The Balfour report, the Statute of Westminster and the Ottawa agreements
- d) Towards a unified imperial policy? The evolution of the empire in non-settlement colonies

3) Institutionalising the Commonwealth as a fully-fledged international organisation (1949-1971)

- a) A less British Commonwealth? Decolonisation and the London declaration
- b) Less British but still little institutionalised: the ambiguous status of the Commonwealth
- c) The Commonwealth against Britain? The impact of the Rhodesian crisis
- d) The Commonwealth in search of a new role: The Singapore declaration of 1971

II- The Commonwealth as an international organisation (since 1971)

1) A bridge between the North and the South

- a) Developing Commonwealth multilateral economic cooperation
- b) Helping the world to negotiate: Commonwealth contribution to international relations
- c) Transnational outlook: a Commonwealth of peoples?

2) The promotion of human rights and democratic principles

- a) A new agenda in the Post-Cold war world: democracy as a priority
- b) Empire redux? The Zimbabwean issue and the crisis of the Commonwealth
- c) Back to basics? The Commonwealth Charter (2013)

3) Is the Commonwealth still relevant?

- a) Supporting “small states” as the Commonwealth main mission
- b) Is there a “Commonwealth factor” in the relations among Commonwealth members?