

Telegram from the Commonwealth Relations Office to Terence Allen Shone on India's future relationship with the Commonwealth (London, 24 December 1948)

Caption: On 24 December 1948, the Commonwealth Relations Office sends a telegram to Terence Allen Shone, United Kingdom High Commissioner in India, in which it reports on the recent discussions with the Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon, on future relations between India and the Commonwealth. The main issue at stake concerns India's allegiance to the British Crown.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

Outward Telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office

POLITICAL DEPARTMENT

CYPHER (TYPEX)

TO: U.K. HIGH COMMISSIONER IN INDIA

(SENT: 16.30 hours, 24th December, 1948)

IMMEDIATE

No. 3404

TOP SECRET

PERSONAL

My telegram 3325 16th December. (106)

Prime Minister with Chancellor of the Exchequer and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State yesterday saw Krishna Menon at latter's request.

2. Menon explained that meaning of paragraph 7 of his aide memoire was merely that Nehru thought words suggested in latter part of paragraph 4(b) of Prime Minister's telegram 3109 might be redundant and that point was of minor importance as it would be very clearly implied.

3. Prime Minister drew High Commissioner's attention to fact that Nehru's reply had been silent on position of Crown and emphasized very strongly great difficulty that would be involved in leaving out this link not only because of opinion here, but because views of Dominions had to be taken into account. There was also the question of recognition of the relationship by foreign countries. If there was no link with the Crown then something by way of association would have to be examined but this would involve a different relationship from membership. High Commissioner replied that it would in fact imply two circles of members and this was not at all what India wanted. She did not want to get into the same position as Eire but to be clearly in or out of Commonwealth.

4. In discussion that followed High Commissioner expressed strong personal support for idea of a delegation by His Majesty of /his

his functions to Governor-General if a suitable basis for this could be found; the functions being delegated would be transferred by the Constitution from the Governor General to the President. Ministers have expressed grave doubts on legal possibility of this. Prime Minister stated that it would be very difficult for the King to accept delegation of his functions to a person who was not only not appointed by him, but was not advised by His Majesty's Indian Minister. Menon explained that anxiety of India to avoid growth of pro and anti-Commonwealth parties was what made it difficult to state relationships in too clear a manner.

5. He then suggested that India might in its Constitution define Commonwealth citizenship in terms of the British Nationality Act. According to this Act a Commonwealth citizen is declared to be the same thing as a British subject. Consequences would therefore be that Indian Constitution would without explicitly doing so imply that Indians would be British subjects and therefore owe some sort of allegiance. Prime Minister undertook to examine this point urgently and I will let you know result.

6. Emphasis was laid in discussion on importance of King's position being recognised as a fount of honour and on possible value of a series of minor points which by themselves might be insufficient, adding up in the aggregate, to a real relationship within the Commonwealth.

7. Ministers were impressed by Krishna Menon's obvious anxiety to find a workable and acceptable arrangement and by his desire to make constructive suggestions. We are not clear how far, in speaking as he did, he was speaking otherwise than purely personally. Indeed he expressly reserved his Government's views on the point of citizenship. He thought he could carry Nehru with him on this. But it may help you to have information above for your own strictly personal information and as background in any talks you have with Nehru. We will of course let Krishna Menon know outcome of technical examination of his suggestion about Commonwealth citizenship and will inform you simultaneously. Throughout the discussion Ministers laid
/great

great stress on importance of a real link with the Crown and serious political difficulties that its absence would involve the Commonwealth as well as for ourselves.

8. As you know, Prime Minister's telegram No.3109 of 20th November asked Nehru positively his view on the principle of a delegation by the King if an acceptable and legally water-tight form of delegation admitted of being devised. For your own information Dominion representatives when they recently reviewed the position with the Prime Minister expressed much surprise that Nehru had given no answer on this point, particularly as they had emphasised it so strongly in their conversations with Bajpai in Paris. The further conversations with the High Commissioner described in the earlier part of this telegram, which we feel sure Krishna Menon will report to Nehru, again emphasised the very great and real importance of this issue. We sincerely trust therefore that if you are able to have the conversations with Nehru which you have in mind you may be able to lead him to express a view and to take account of the practical and political importance of finding a solid bridge of this nature on which we and the Dominion Governments could face criticism. We quite realise his difficulties and, hope (like the Dominion representatives) that he too will realise ours. He need be in no doubt as to our genuine and deep desire to keep India within the Commonwealth on a satisfactory basis and you can certainly assure him that we would not press him on this point were it not because of this. For your own information we fully share Krishna Menon's feeling that association, as distinct from membership, is from all points of view a distinctly less satisfactory idea than membership of the Commonwealth. If he has any alternative suggestion as to how we could find a substantial basis for providing for the King as the link we should naturally be most ready to consider it with the utmost expedition and sympathy.

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