CABINET

COMMONWEALTH IMMIGRATION: CONSULTATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations

We are committed (a) to reviewing, in consultation with other Commonwealth Governments, the method of controlling Commonwealth immigration to this country, but (b) to continuing the existing control in force meanwhile.

2. Other Commonwealth Governments appear, in general, to have accepted the necessity for control, and they have made no suggestions for any radical change in the method of control. The number of immigrants from Commonwealth countries, other than the old Dominions, since 1955 now amounts to a figure of the order of 600,000, to which must be added a substantial natural increase. The presence of so many immigrants, particularly in some of the large cities in which they congregate, has undoubtedly aroused some public resentment and has caused social difficulties and added materially to the strain on housing and other services. A very strict degree of control is therefore in everyone's interest, to give time for the process of absorbing these new communities to proceed without the pressure of further immigration on a large scale. The fact that there are 330,000 applicants on the waiting list for non-priority labour vouchers gives some indication of the potential inflow if control were relaxed, with the consequent risk of far greater social strains and even of breakdown of the services affected.

3. Part I of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, under which the present control is exercised, will lapse at the end of this year unless renewed, and it is therefore imperative that it should be continued in force by the annual Expiring Laws Continuance Bill. This will be published in a few days' time and will come up for debate this month.

4. We think it important that we should be in a position in debate to say that we have taken the first steps towards giving other Commonwealth Governments the opportunity to discuss immigration control with us. This means that we should send them a suitable communication as soon as possible. In view of the difficulties of the situation we should avoid committing ourselves to making any proposals for changing the system of control, and it is desirable
that we should retain the initiative in any Commonwealth discussions. We suggest therefore that the communication should be confined to announcing our readiness to discuss the subject, if other Governments think it would be useful to do so.

5. A draft message to Commonwealth Governments on these lines is attached for the consideration of our colleagues.

F. S.
A. B.

3rd November, 1964
DRAFT COMMUNICATION TO COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENTS

The British Government are reviewing the operation of the present controls on immigration from the Commonwealth. It is clearly important that the flow of immigrants into this densely populated country should not exceed the rate at which they can be absorbed into the life of the community and properly accommodated in the large cities where work is available; limitation is in the interests of the people of this country, of the immigrants already settled here, and of the new immigrants themselves.

It is evident that many more people from the Commonwealth wish to come to Britain than can possibly be absorbed. For instance, there are some 330,000 applicants at present on the waiting list for Category C vouchers, and this number would be even larger but for the "standstill" which was placed in June on new non-priority applications from India and Pakistan. And large numbers of immigrants are accompanied, or followed later, by dependants.

As Commonwealth Governments are aware, control is at present exercised under Part I of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act which will, unless renewed, expire at the end of this year. The British Government have decided to propose its renewal for a further year by including it in the Expiring Laws Continuance Bill, which has just been introduced. The British Government will however be very ready to discuss with Commonwealth Governments the form of the existing control as soon as their own review of the position has been carried out and would be glad to know whether the Government of ............... think that discussions between them and the British Government could be usefully instituted for this purpose.