

AN ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS BETWEEN
1945 AND 1961

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SUMMARY

This thesis provides a survey and an analysis of South Africa's relations with the British Commonwealth (Commonwealth of Nations) between the years 1945 and 1961. It outlines and explains the deterioration of this relationship in the context of the crisis in South Africa's foreign relations after World War II. Documentary evidence is produced to throw more light on the relationship with Britain and, to a lesser extent, other Commonwealth countries. This relationship is analysed in the context of political, economic and strategic imperatives which made it necessary for Britain to continue to seek South Africa's co-operation within the Commonwealth.

This thesis also describes how the African and Asian influence began to be felt within the Commonwealth on racial issues. This influence was to become particularly important during the crucial period after the Sharpeville incident. The attitudes of Britain and other Commonwealth countries at the two crucial conferences of 1960 and 1961 are re-examined.

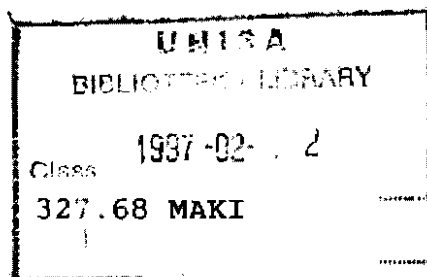
The attitude of extra-parliamentary organisations in South Africa towards the Commonwealth connection is an important theme of this thesis in addition to the other themes mentioned above. It is demonstrated how Indian and African opinions became increasingly hostile towards what was seen as British and "white" Commonwealth "appeasement" of South Africa. These attitudes are surveyed in the context of an increasing radicalisation of black politics in South Africa. The movement by English and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans toward a consensus on racial and foreign policy is also examined.

Finally, the epilogue to this thesis discusses the return of South Africa to the Commonwealth in 1994. It includes a brief survey of developments in the Commonwealth attitude to South Africa since 1961.

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Key Terms

Commonwealth and South Africa; British Commonwealth; International relations; Foreign affairs; Africa and apartheid; High Commission Territories; United Nations and South Africa; African National Congress; India and South Africa; Pan Africanist Congress; South African Indian Congress; Economic and military policies; Britain and South Africa; Smuts; Malan; Strijdom; Verwoerd.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CA	Cape Archives
CAF	Central African Federation
CDA	Combined Development Agency
CO	Colonial Office
COD	Congress of Democrats
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
CSA	Commonwealth Sugar Agreement
DO	Dominions Office
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Agreement
INCH	Institute for Contemporary History
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan African Congress
PP	Progressive Party
PRO	Public Record Office
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
TA	Transvaal Archives
UNO (UN)	United Nations Organisation
UP	United Party
WCL	William Cullen Library

PREFACE

In this thesis the author has presented an overview and an analysis of the changing relationship between South Africa and the British Commonwealth (or, as it is more simply known today, the "Commonwealth of Nations") between 1945 and 1961. The period from 1961, when South Africa left the Commonwealth, up to the readmission of South Africa to the Commonwealth in 1994, is summarised and evaluated in an epilogue.

The year 1945 was chosen as a useful opening date for this analysis because it marked a clear historical dividing point between the old and the new in terms of British Commonwealth history in general and in South Africa's external relations in particular. The dominions and Britain emerged from the war into a new world order dominated by the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. Even though Britain remained a power of the first rank, with her empire and Commonwealth intact, it had become clear during the war that she could not match the resources and scale of industrial output of her two allies. Furthermore, the strategic problem of trying to protect an empire scattered across the globe had proved to be beyond Britain's capabilities as evidenced by the fall of Singapore and the life and death struggle in the Mediterranean and Europe. Britain had come out on the winning side but greatly weakened. The dominions, on the other hand, had greatly increased their relative economic strength and their influence within the Commonwealth although on the world stage their role would soon prove to be much diminished compared to the pre-war years.

It soon became clear that centrifugal forces within the Commonwealth were accelerating after the war and that those who sought a united, federal empire were doomed to fail. The dominions, while still remaining loyal to the Commonwealth, were determined (with the possible exception of New Zealand) to go their own way politically, economically and militarily and this was soon revealed by the Commonwealth bloc's voting record at the

United Nations. Inevitably, the expansion of the Commonwealth in the late forties and fifties (with the accession of new Asian and African members) would weaken the cohesiveness of the organisation even more, making it difficult to present a united Commonwealth front on any important issue, even if such a display of unity was by then really desired.

South Africa, despite its loyal, pro-Commonwealth government under General Jan Smuts, was ranged on the side of those dominions (Canada and, briefly, Ireland) that desired greater autonomy for the Commonwealth after the war. D.F. Malan's Nationalists after 1948 forced the pace even more as their long-term aim of achieving a republic inside or outside the Commonwealth fold gathered strength. But it was South Africa's racial policies, before and after 1948, which chiefly determined her increasing distance from the rest of the "family" in the post-war years and which have been recognised by most commentators as being the main factor in driving her towards eventual separation from the Commonwealth in 1961. Authors such as Nicholas Mansergh, W.K. Hancock, J.D.B. Miller, Dennis Austin and others, writing from a British or wider Commonwealth perspective, have concentrated largely upon the latter factor in their explanation for South Africa's gradual move away from the Commonwealth fold.¹

The present writer aims to place South Africa's relations with the Commonwealth in the context of the general loosening of Commonwealth ties after the war, the increasing strength of Afrikaner nationalism and republicanism and, most importantly,

¹ N. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience (London, Mackay and Chatham, 1969). W.K. Hancock, Smuts, Vol.2, The Fields of Force. 1919-1950 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968). J.D.B. Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions (London, Chatto and Windus, 1966) and Survey of Commonwealth Affairs. Problems of Expansion and Attrition, 1953-1969 (London, Oxford University Press, 1974). Dennis Austin, The Commonwealth and Britain. Chatham House Papers: 41 (London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1988) and Britain and South Africa (Oxford, OUP, 1966).

in the context of the post-war "crisis" in South Africa's foreign relations. This crisis, which had its origins in the changed international environment provided by the establishment of the United Nations and the massive emphasis on national freedom and human rights after the war, greatly affected South Africa's external relations in general and her Commonwealth relations in particular. It was what some writers have termed a "crisis of legitimacy"² - a massive challenge to the national identity (South Africa as a "colonial" or "African" country) and to the legitimacy of white rule in South Africa - which preoccupied those responsible for the formulation of external policy for over four decades after the war. Among other consequences, it led to South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961.

As Spence has put it, South African foreign policy (after 1948) was "primarily concerned with defending domestic policy and by implication the very structure of South African society and the values underpinning it".³ As Vale has noted in reference to withdrawal from the Commonwealth, the importance of the "retirement-under-pressure" of South Africa from the Commonwealth was that it was the "first aggressive enforcement" of the doctrine of denial of legitimacy.⁴ In the process an implicit questioning of the South African national identity and of the "sovereignty" of the white-ruled state occurred. This led, in turn, to the consolidation and mobilisation of the power of post-colonial Africa in shaping the campaign against apartheid.

While similar themes are found in the works of other authors

² See Jack Spence, "South Africa and the Modern World", in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.2, South Africa 1870 - 1966 (London, OUP, 1971), pp.525-526 and Republic under Pressure (London, OUP, 1965) and C.A. Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid 1945-63" (D.Phil.thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1992), pp.422-425.

³ Spence, "South Africa and the Modern World", p.526.

⁴ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.425.

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focusing upon South Africa's foreign relations after World War II, such as S. Nolutshungu, J. Barber and J. Barratt, R. Davenport and others,⁵ those concentrating on South African policy making such as Deon Geldenhuys,⁶ or on the history of South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth, such as O. Geysler, have given closer insights into the policy-making decisions of the politicians most closely involved in the republican and Commonwealth issues in South Africa.⁷

Those writing from a broader "Commonwealth" perspective (Miller, Austin, Mansergh and others) rather than a more South African perspective (Geysler, Krüger, Barratt and Barber, Vale, etc.), while placing South Africa's departure in the context of the growing independence movement in Africa in the late 1950's,⁸ have stressed the attitude of Britain and the other "white" dominions as being crucial. The conclusion was generally reached that, on the whole, these countries were, with qualifications in the cases of Britain and Australia, not ultimately prepared to sacrifice Commonwealth unity and the membership of the new Afro-Asian countries for the sake of keeping South Africa in the family.⁹

⁵ S. Nolutshungu, South Africa in Africa (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1975), and "The Impact of External Opposition on South African Politics", in L. Thompson and J. Butler (eds), Change in Contemporary South Africa (Los Angeles, University of Los Angeles Press, 1975). J. Barber and J. Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy. The Search for Status and Security 1945-1988, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990). R. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (ch.18, "Salesmanship: Ethnasia contra Mundi 1945-1984"), (Johannesburg, MacMillan, 1987), pp.476-50.

⁶ Deon Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation. South African Foreign Policy Making (Johannesburg, Macmillan, South African Institute of International Affairs, 1984).

⁷ O. Geysler, Watershed for South Africa, London 1961, (Pretoria, Butterworths, 1983) and Suid Afrika se Rol in die Britse Statebond 1921-1961 (Bloemfontein, Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, UOVS, 1983)

⁸ See for example, Miller, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, p.126

⁹ D. Austin, The Commonwealth and Britain, p.8.

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Britain was reluctant to lose South Africa given her longstanding and wide-ranging ties with that country, but "for the first time...forces outside the British-South African relationship exerted pressure on the United Kingdom to break formal links with South Africa".¹⁰ In 1961, the combination of international obloquy, denunciation from liberals in Britain and the "intransigence" of the Afrikaner Nationalist government had forced South Africa and Britain apart.¹¹

This study will suggest, however, that considerably more emphasis must be placed on British attempts to maintain a working relationship with South Africa in the Commonwealth for economic, strategic and political reasons and that no less important than the factors which authors such as Miller see as forcing Britain and South Africa apart were those forcing them together. It will be shown that British governments, whether Labour or Conservative, were placed in the position of continually having to placate or appease South African governments, whether that of the loyal Commonwealth statesman, Jan Smuts, or those of the Nationalists under Malan, Strijdom and Verwoerd. Drawing on an analysis of British cabinet and dominions office files relating to South Africa, it can be demonstrated how British policy-makers, from Attlee to Macmillan (or, in the case of the high commissioners in South Africa, from Baring to Maud), were constantly aware of the weakness of their position in relation to South Africa and how issues such as South Africa's attempts to achieve transfer of the high commission territories were linked to strategic economic and military considerations such as co-operation in the sterling area, gold and uranium supplies and the maintenance of the military connection.

In comparing the relations of South Africa and Britain with those of the other dominions and Britain, Miller notes that British-South African relations never shared "the same family atmosphere"

¹⁰ Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.97.

¹¹ Ibid., p.98.

as relations between Britain and the other three (Canada, Australia and New Zealand).¹² The major issues between Britain and South Africa such as the disposition of the high commission territories, the status of Indians in Natal, the question of neutrality, etc. had been more "formidable" and "more the kinds of things that constitute traditional diplomacy than the arguments over trade which have been for so long the stuff of negotiations with the other dominions". This was especially the case after 1948 although during Smuts's post-war government there were already signs of a more formal relationship. Nevertheless, what it meant in practice was a redoubling of the efforts of British governments to retain South Africa's co-operation in the Commonwealth by adopting policies towards her that aimed to mollify and placate rather than distantiate. This is illustrated in the interpretations of authors such as G.R. Berridge¹³ and Michael Dutfield,¹⁴ interpretations which have thrown much light on aspects of the British relationship with South Africa concerning military connections and to economic and strategic factors in this relationship. Their interpretations will be supplemented by further evidence of British attempts to maintain South African co-operation in the Commonwealth by making concessions in areas of policy concerning the high commission territories, decolonisation and defence issues.

In tandem with the mounting hostility displayed by the outside world to South Africa's race policies and with the decreasing influence of Britain over the Commonwealth and over South Africa's political future was a movement by the English-speaking sector of the white population towards a less emotional attachment to the British (and, therefore, Commonwealth)

¹² Ibid., p.102.

¹³ G.R. Berridge, South Africa, the Colonial Powers and 'African Defence'. The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, 1948-60 (New York, St.Martin's Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Michael Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience. The Persecution of Seretse and Ruth Khama (London, Unwin and Hyman, 1990).

connection. This is evidenced not only in the voting figures which showed increasing support for the Nationalists in general elections throughout this period but also in the opinion columns of major English-language newspapers. On issues such as the "Indian Question" in the UN and later the apartheid issue, English-language newspapers, while remaining loyal to the opposition United Party, were expressing increasing frustration with the attacks of the Afro-Asian Commonwealth on South Africa and with the inability of the "old" (white) dominions to stop these attacks.

Inevitably, the strength of opposition to the Nationalist republican programme by the English-speaking sector was weakened in the process and was further damaged, as will be shown, by the British government's ambivalence (and impotence) in relation to the Nationalist programme. The gradual loss of the symbols of the British connection meant the growth of a white South African nationalism defined, negatively, by an opposition to black nationalism, communism and a hostile world opinion.

Miller has noticed this phenomenon of English-speaking South Africans being increasingly marginalised in the political arena and having to take "second place" in their country's politics - partly a result, he says, of their minority position and partly of their ultimate inability to formulate "a distinctive position on the colour question".¹⁵ There was no defence against the demands of Afrikaner extremists that the English acquiesce in Afrikaner standards for the sake of preserving a white front against black encroachment. It is easy "to trace the melancholy movement of South African politics towards a white consensus on Apartheid".¹⁶ This "toenadering" of the English and Afrikaans on race issues will be noted further in this study by placing it in the context of the general crisis in South Africa's international race relations after World War II and its effects

¹⁵ Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.100.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.101.

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on South African attitudes to the Commonwealth connection in particular.

Nationalist economic policies after 1948 and the general context of loosening Commonwealth trading links in the post-war years, further contributed to the weakening of South Africa's post-war Commonwealth ties. Smuts's post-war government was also not immune to the dictates of economic nationalism. It had already encountered political criticisms from the Nationalist opposition (and from some of its own supporters) for giving Britain too much and not getting enough in return during the negotiations over the gold loan to Britain in 1947 and 1948 - criticisms which centred on the lack of reciprocal arrangements for access to the British colonial market for South African exports. Successive sterling crises in the late forties and early fifties and the declining value of Commonwealth preferences in the post-war years stimulated policies of market diversification and import substitution in several Commonwealth countries, and South Africa was no exception.¹⁷

English mining, financial and industrial capital still dominated the economy during the 1950s and 1960s but the Nationalists embarked on a programme of promoting Afrikaner economic interests through expansion of the bureaucracy and parastatal sector which successfully raised the Afrikaner share of per capita income and which increased the pressure on English capital to soften its attitude to the Nationalist government.¹⁸ The Nationalists' encouragement (despite some ambiguity at first) of foreign investment and their decision to remain committed to continued co-operation within the sterling area system were further inducements to English business interests to modify their

¹⁷ See Brindley Thomas, "The Evolution of the Sterling Area", in N. Mansergh and R. Wilson (eds), Commonwealth Perspectives, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp.192-197 and Miller, Survey, pp.438-453.

¹⁸ N. Nattrass and E. Ardington (eds.), The Political Economy of South Africa (Cape Town, OUP, 1990), pp.10-12.

hostility to the new government.

Foreign investment was critical to South Africa's developing industrial infrastructure throughout the period under examination but was vulnerable to political uncertainties created by the coming to power of the Nationalists in 1948. This was illustrated dramatically by capital outflows during political upheavals such as the ANC Defiance Campaign of the mid-1950s and, in particular, by the Sharpeville incident and circumstances surrounding withdrawal from the Commonwealth.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Commonwealth remained South Africa's main trading and financial partner throughout the period under review and British investments remained overwhelmingly predominant.²⁰

Spence has argued that it was the increasing influence of the African and Asian Commonwealth countries that enabled Verwoerd to demonstrate convincingly to his English minority in 1961 that the "old Commonwealth of white dominions linked to the mother country existed no more".²¹ Thus, Verwoerd could argue that in the place of the old club was a multi-racial association of states, "the majority of which were bitterly hostile to South African racial policies and cared little for the so-called rights of an English-speaking minority". Thus the English minority was able to accept the end of the Commonwealth relationship and to draw closer to Afrikaner opinion on foreign relations and race relations in general. As Miller puts it, the attempt to assert British values and solutions in South Africa had "rebounded upon those who tried it whether in early anglicisation efforts or in the later commitment to the United Kingdom in two world wars".²²

The post-war deterioration of South Africa's position in the

¹⁹ Ibid., p.14.

²⁰ Miller, Survey, pp.448-450.

²¹ Wilson and Thompson (eds), Oxford History of South Africa, p.487.

²² Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.98.

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Commonwealth also affected African and Indian opinions in South Africa towards the British connection, the monarchy and the Commonwealth. The reasons, however, were very different and the reactions much greater than those elicited from the white English South African community. It will be shown how organisations such as the African Nationalist Congress and its allies became increasingly disenchanted with Britain and the other "white" dominions for what were seen as their attempts to appease the South African government over various aspects of racial policy. In inverse proportion, on the other hand, was the rise of African nationalist fervour and support for the newly independent members of the Afro-Asian Commonwealth such as India, Ghana and Nigeria.

Inevitably the strong feelings against colonialism in general, and British rule in Africa in particular after World War II, had affected South African black opinion in ways which tended to colour its view of the Commonwealth which, until an Afro-Asian majority was achieved in 1961, was still seen as a "White Man's Club". It was not surprising, therefore, that on the eve of the withdrawal conference of 1961, the main organs of African and Indian opinion were calling on the Afro-Asian members to put pressure on the others for South Africa's expulsion from the "Club". It had become clear by then that Britain and most of the white dominions were not prepared to take measures that would force South Africa to change its policies and so exclusion from the organisation was seen as the first step on the road to the total isolation of the apartheid government.

O. Geyser²³ (and historians such as D.W. Krüger)²⁴ have tended to emphasize what they saw as unjustifiable and largely Afro-Asian inspired interference in South Africa's internal affairs as being the main cause of South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961. This explanation was for many years

²³ Geyser, Watershed, pp.76-98.

²⁴ D.W. Krüger, The Making of a Nation. A History of the Union of South Africa, 1910-1961, (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1969), pp.333-335.

supported by what one might call "conservative" opinion in Britain and the old "white" Commonwealth countries and was based largely on the memoirs of important statesmen of the time such as Harold Macmillan of Britain and Robert Menzies of Australia.²⁵ It has been challenged by recent analyses which have concentrated, in particular, on the role of the Canadian prime minister, John Diefenbaker, who is seen as less important in the forcing out of South Africa from the Commonwealth than was previously thought to be the case.²⁶

This study aims, further, to supplement this interpretation with a view which places more importance on the role of the British government under Harold Macmillan in its attempts during the crucial months after Sharpeville to maintain British economic, strategic and political interests in South Africa. Ultimately, this was Macmillan's overriding concern, more important even than that of keeping South Africa in the Commonwealth and it led to a policy of equivocation and ambivalence which, in the end, contributed to the republican cause and weakened the case of those arguing for a change in South Africa's racial policies as a condition for keeping her in the Commonwealth.

This thesis, therefore, attempts to introduce a broader outline of the factors contributing to the decline and deterioration of South Africa's Commonwealth relations in the period 1945 to 1961.

²⁵ Harold Macmillan, Pointing the Way (London, Macmillan, 1972) and Robert Menzies, Afternoon Light (London, Cassell, 1967).

²⁶ See, for example, H. Basil Robinson's biography of Diefenbaker entitled Diefenbaker's World. A Populist in Foreign Affairs (London, University of Toronto Press, 1989), and the summary of his views in Peter Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies and Attitudes to South Africa" (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London), Paper presented to South African Historical Society Conference, University of Potchefstroom, February 1993. Most succinct in his review of Diefenbaker's role at the 1960 and 1961 conferences is J.R.T. Wood's article entitled "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd in the Withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth", Journal of Contemporary African Studies, Vol.6, No.1/2, April/October 1987, pp.153-179.

It accounts for the views of African and Indian organisations on the Commonwealth connection and introduces a closer look at economic, political and strategic themes in the relationship. While not significantly deviating from the explanations based upon political and diplomatic factors mentioned by authors such as Miller, Austin, Barber and Barratt and others, somewhat more emphasis has been given to the role of successive British governments in adopting what a few writers and commentators have referred to "appeasement" strategies²⁷ in relation to South Africa's racial policies.

The effect of British reluctance to put economic or other forms of pressure on South Africa before and after 1961 was an important factor in driving black nationalist opinion towards a redefinition of strategy relating to the application of international pressure on the South African government. The United Nations became the main forum for the ANC, the SAIC and the PAC in their appeals to international opinion. Before 1961 the main aim was to appeal to the newly-independent members of the Commonwealth to use their influence to try and force a change in South Africa's policies, or failing that, to get her excluded from the Commonwealth. When the latter had been achieved, the Commonwealth remained an important forum (especially after 1961 when the organisation acquired an Afro-Asian majority of members) to put pressure on Britain and the other white dominions to isolate South Africa even further. It is true to say that during the long years of exile the South African liberation movements achieved an intimate and sympathetic hearing among Commonwealth circles in London and of course in African and Asian Commonwealth capitals. At times the Commonwealth was at the forefront of international attempts to isolate South Africa diplomatically, politically and in the sphere of sport (notwithstanding the

²⁷ See, in particular, Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, and, for example, the discussion in M. Legum, et al, Against All Reasons: Britain and South Africa in the Eighties (London, Fabian Society, 1981).

opposition from Britain towards any form of economic pressure) and London remained the headquarters of the most important liberation movement in exile between 1961 and 1990.

The epilogue of this thesis will briefly discuss the effect which southern African issues in general and South Africa, in particular, had on the development of the Commonwealth after 1961 in the wider context of an organisation which was rapidly losing its British-centred nature and becoming more of a "mini-UNO" in terms of its size, diversity of opinions and methods of operation. The factors leading to the return to the Commonwealth fold in the much-changed circumstances of the 1990's will be discussed as will the reception given to the readmittance of the country to the "Club" by the main organs of white and black opinion in 1994 and 1995. The implications of renewed Commonwealth membership for South Africa's trading and diplomatic relations will also be touched upon.

The archival sources of use to this study were drawn primarily from the Transvaal Archives in Pretoria, the Cape Archives in Cape Town, the Public Record Office in London and the Institute for Contemporary History in Bloemfontein. Restrictions were still in place in South Africa when this study was under-way (1990-1995) on access to relevant cabinet files and foreign affairs department files. This made it necessary to concentrate upon the private collections of prominent South African statesmen who contributed to the formation of government policy towards Britain and the Commonwealth in general during the period 1945 to 1961.

The files of the Smuts and Te Water collections in Pretoria were of considerable use for the immediate post-war years and revealed a mass of relevant information on government attitudes to Britain and the Commonwealth during the Smuts and Malan periods. The Strijdom collection contained some useful private and official correspondence which gave insights into Strijdom's earlier and later feelings concerning republicanism and the Commonwealth connection. The Geyer collection in the Cape

Archives contained a wealth of correspondence between Malan and Geyer (in London) revealing much of Malan's feelings concerning British decolonisation policy and his response to that policy. The Dönges collection was useful on matters pertaining to immigration and citizenship during Malan's premiership and on some economic and financial implications of republican independence in 1960 and 1961.

In Bloemfontein the Eric Louw collection contained some useful correspondence as well as collections of manuscripts and articles written by the minister and revealing much of his private and public attitudes before and after 1948. It also contained a mass of local and overseas press cuttings that were valuable for a study of the period between the Sharpeville incident and the May 1960 Commonwealth prime ministers' conference. The H.F. Verwoerd collection did not reveal much about the prime minister's official and private sentiments during the crucial period leading up to the withdrawal conference in 1961 but contained some useful correspondence on the issue of the high commission territories. It also provided a wealth of press cuttings on various aspects of relevant internal and external policy, including the 1961 conference itself.

The files of the ANC collection based in the Historical Papers section of the William Cullen library at the University of the Witwatersrand contained reports of annual conferences and national executive committee meetings of the ANC which contained some useful information on the organisation's attitudes towards British imperialism, decolonisation and aspects of foreign policy in general. Pamphlets and official statements on the National Party's republican campaign and on the Commonwealth connection in the period 1960-61 were particularly valuable. Some useful references to the attitude of the PAC, in copies of speeches and statements by various spokesmen of the latter organisation, were also noted.

The files of the dominions (later Commonwealth Relations) office

in London, together with those of the British cabinet between 1945 and 1961 provided most of the foundation material on which the important arguments and deductions of this study are based. Only a handful of the files selected proved to be restricted (usually those relating to aspects of defence policy) and it was fortuitous that the thirty-year rule coincided with the opening of files for 1960 and some for 1961 when the author was in London. Most useful for this study was the correspondence between British high commissioners in South Africa from Baring to Maud between the years 1945 and 1960 (although time and financial constraints made it impossible to extend the study of the latter up until the 1961 Commonwealth conference). The nuances of British policy towards Verwoerd's unfolding republican programme and the concerns relating to South Africa's Commonwealth membership in the period 1958 to 1961 are revealed in the correspondence between the high commissioner and his secretary of state. These were supplemented by some particularly useful cabinet discussions relating to the 1960 conference and its aftermath.

**PART 1: SMUTS, SOUTH AFRICA AND THE POST-WAR
COMMONWEALTH, 1945-1948**

Introduction

General Jan Smuts's last four years as prime minister represented the high point of South Africa's post-war Commonwealth relations. They were the last years (before 1994) in which South Africa enjoyed a reasonably intimate and cordial relationship with the British Commonwealth of Nations. Yet, even under the man who personified the spirit of Commonwealth solidarity in peace and in war and who can be considered in some ways as the architect of the Commonwealth concept itself, forces antagonistic to South Africa's Commonwealth relations were gathering strength. The country's deteriorating race relations proved to be the most important of these forces and provided the context within which other factors of an economic, political and ideological nature operated.

It was the relationship with Britain that was the crucial defining point of South Africa's Commonwealth relationship during Smuts's premiership (and thereafter). The British response to South African issues and the effect of this response on public opinion in South Africa towards the Commonwealth will therefore provide much of the material of this section's study.

Smuts's post-war government faced increasingly awkward relations with the new Labour government in Britain over issues such as the treatment of Indians in South Africa, the incorporation of the high commission territories as well as the thorny problem of South West Africa. But at the same time the weakness of the Commonwealth trading system became glaringly evident in successive sterling crises which Smuts's government was called upon to help resolve by giving loans to Britain and by boosting the gold reserves of the sterling area. Britain's response to the South African "problem" was thus narrowly circumscribed by economic and strategic factors militating against any sort of harsh criticism of a valued Commonwealth ally. Britain's support of Smuts at the UNO over the Indian and South West African questions would in turn begin to alienate African and Indian

opinion in South Africa from the British (and, thus, the Commonwealth) connection, a process that would intensify during the years of Nationalist rule that followed.

The war-time stimulus to the South African economy had boosted industrialisation and had increased the forces of economic nationalism and protectionism in South Africa. In the long term, post-war world economic trends favoured a lessened dependence on the Commonwealth economic nexus for South Africa and the other dominions but in South Africa's case these trends were reinforced by ideological factors (Afrikaner economic nationalism) and political factors (trading interests within Smuts's own party). Much the same could be said for other areas of South Africa's Commonwealth relations such as military connections and Commonwealth political co-operation, areas in which Smuts had to tread warily in the face of a vociferous anti-British opposition in parliament.

At home Smuts faced the growing strength of Afrikaner nationalism on the one hand, and African nationalism on the other. Both nationalisms had received enormous stimulus during World War II and drew upon conditions in South Africa after the war to garner further support. While African nationalists condemned Smuts's policy of indefinite trusteeship and pushed for equal voting and civic rights with the white population, using the principles enunciated in the war-time Atlantic Charter to back up their claims¹, Afrikaner nationalists were pushing for exactly the opposite - an Afrikaner republic in which the African, Indian and coloured population would be forever subordinate to white control.

Thus, the dilemma which faced Smuts in terms of South Africa's Commonwealth relations and foreign relations in general was that

¹ See Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985), chapters 1 and 2 and T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (London, Macmillan, 1977), pp.244-251 for a useful summary of developments in black politics during Smuts's post-war period of government.

which has been faced by every South African government since : how to reconcile the "Colour Question" with the need to maintain normal relations with the outside world. "Colour queers my poor pitch everywhere" was Smuts's much-quoted lament bearing testimony to the difficulties which race relations at home had caused him in his diplomatic dealings at the United Nations and, to a lesser extent, in Commonwealth circles by 1947.² The irony is that Smuts's philosophical leanings and the whole history of his engagement with and contribution to the Commonwealth ideal had not prepared him for the storm facing his government over race policy. In order to understand the background to this crisis in South Africa's international relations it is necessary to take a brief look at the history of Smuts's involvement with the Commonwealth "ideal" since the end of the South African War of 1899-1902 and his evolving interpretation of South Africa's position within the British Empire.

Defeat and reconciliation at the turn of the century had given Smuts his faith in the Commonwealth ideal and his vision of the Commonwealth as an "equal brotherhood of those who had ruled with those who had been ruled".³ That these concepts of reconciliation and equal brotherhood applied only to English and Afrikaner in South Africa was self-evident in terms of the context of the time and Smuts's own thinking. "Race relations" was a term which, until the end of the Second World War, referred to the relations between the two white language groups in South Africa and not between the white and black races. Smuts's faith in the Commonwealth, undimmed by 1945, rested primarily on the premise that it represented the continuing basis for Anglo-Afrikaner reconciliation at home and the chief hope of peace abroad. The question of the relations between white and black at home did not enter into the definition of Commonwealth and was entirely a different, and to Smuts, subsidiary issue of domestic

² Quoted in W.K. Hancock, Smuts, Vol.2, The Fields of Force, 1919-1950 (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p.473.

³ N. Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience (London, Mackay and Chatham, 1969), p.377.

significance only.

To Smuts the only way in which real and meaningful freedom for South Africa could be achieved was within the British Empire.⁴ As Geysler puts it, "he saw in the British Empire the *imperium* within which his holistic concept could be realised in practice".⁵ His negotiations with the Liberal British government of Henry Campbell-Bannerman after 1906 for the self-government of the former Boer republics had formed the background and the basis for this belief. Thereafter he was convinced that South Africa as part of the British Empire would "gain the necessary standing so that she could maintain herself as a small nation in international politics".⁶

By the time of the outbreak of the First World War the dominions of South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Canada were in full control of their own internal affairs. By 1920 they were practically autonomous in external as well as internal matters. During and after the First World War Smuts had joined with the Canadians and Australians in asserting the rights of the dominions vis-a-vis Britain and had also shared the expansionist aims of the others by demonstrating his desire to annex South West Africa and to extend South African influence into Equatorial Africa. His assertion of South African status at Versailles in 1919 and in the League of Nations was a further indication of his desire for equality for South Africa within the British Empire. His "shrewdness" was to co-operate with an empire which was transforming itself into a Commonwealth, notes Hancock.⁷

The Commonwealth, Smuts believed, was the embryo from which the League of Nations should grow because it was based on the

⁴ O. Geysler, "A Commonwealth Prime Minister. General Jan Christiaan Smuts", The Round Table, No. 320, 1991, p.432.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hancock, Smuts: The Fields of Force, p.5.

principles of national freedom and political decentralisation. This vision was not shared by his Afrikaner Nationalist enemies at home where he was criticised by for being a traitor to his people and the "handmaiden of Empire". "Holism", his obsession with larger political entities, was labelled by his enemies as "imperialism". But to him the Commonwealth was a secure toehold which humanity had already won "upon the cliff of world unity and freedom".⁸

Smuts hated the "disruptive nationalism" which Hertzog's views represented as opposed to what he called "constructive" nationalist sentiment or true "patriotism". The Nationalists under Hertzog were by 1920 proposing independence and republican status outside the Empire, to be achieved by the gradual conversion of the majority of white voters to the republican cause. Smuts vigorously opposed this aim. He saw secession from the Commonwealth as implying the break-up of the Union into Afrikaans, English (and even black) provinces. Secession would mean, in other words, "political suicide" for the Afrikaner and all whites in South Africa. But at the same time he remained a strong supporter of Irish independence and saw that freedom for Ireland was as necessary as it had been for South Africa.⁹

In 1920 he said that the Empire had to change into a Commonwealth of independent states in which the only method of taking decisions would be by the imperial conference system. The leaders of the autonomous dominions would agree to take resolutions on issues that concerned them and there would be no Empire foreign policy without consent of a member state. In this belief, which was expounded in a memorandum to the 1921 imperial conference, he anticipated the Balfour Declaration of 1926. But he was defeated on the issue in 1921 by Hughes of Australia and Massey of New Zealand who saw no need for "constitutional

⁸ Ibid., p.17.

⁹ Ibid., p.49.

tinkerers".¹⁰ It was left to his Nationalist opponent, J.B.M. Hertzog, to negotiate in 1926 the status of autonomy Smuts had envisaged for South Africa. By 1934 the Statute of Westminster and the Status Acts had taken the constitutional development of the Union within the Commonwealth even further by removing the theoretical superiority of the British parliament in legislation and by acknowledging the doctrine of the divisibility of the crown.

Smuts, according to Mansergh, had been the first to attribute the term "British Commonwealth of Nations" to the self-governing states of the Empire,¹¹ to the "white" dominions which had achieved virtual autonomy by the end of the First World War. The word "Commonwealth" had been used in a similar context by other statesmen but Smuts emphasized it in opposition to the idea of imperial federation which was being strongly propounded by Lionel Curtis during and after the war. Smuts, in 1917, was using the term to describe an existing situation - the co-operation of autonomous states within the Empire. But it had its origins in what was seen as the successful experiments in self-government by white, colonial communities in Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa since the mid-nineteenth century.

By the early 1920's the idea was already being extended to incorporate the possibility of non-white communities such as India achieving dominion status, and thus Commonwealth membership.¹² But it was only after the enormous boost given to non-European nationalism in Asia by the Second World War that the first non-white state, India, was given such status. The idea of Empire thus existed side by side with the idea of Commonwealth for many years, right up to the point, in fact, where Commonwealth superseded Empire in the 1960's. In 1949, the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.49.

¹¹ Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, p.23.

¹² Ibid., p.25.

Commonwealth had received its greatest post-war constitutional shift in definition with the acceptance of republics into its midst. By then the term "Commonwealth" meant different things to different people as the British Labour prime minister, Clement Attlee, had pointed out in a speech explaining the new status of the king as head of the Commonwealth. In the speech he had used three different terms ("Empire", "British Commonwealth" and simply, "Commonwealth") to describe the same phenomenon.¹³ Smuts, who had been replaced by the Nationalist leader, D.F. Malan, never quite came to terms with these new developments and remained bitterly opposed to the precedent of republicanism within the Commonwealth and its extension to South Africa.

Smuts's first encounters with international opinion concerning his handling of racial problems at home had come in the early 1920's and were a foretaste of what, on a much greater scale, was to come after the Second World War. Hancock notes that by the early 1920's the stream of "pro-Boer" sentiment in Britain was rapidly drying up and a stream of "pro-Native" sentiment was rising.¹⁴ Much of this was a result of publicity surrounding the Bondelswarts rebellion in South West Africa and Smuts's harsh actions in response to the rebellion. South Africa's actions had been discussed and condemned in the League of Nations and helped to accelerate a long-term change in the direction of British public opinion on South Africa.

It was in the early 1920's, also, that South Africa's Indian policies first attracted attention in the Commonwealth context. At the 1921 imperial conference the Indian delegate, T.B.Sapru, had noted that if the Indian problem in South Africa were allowed to "fester" much longer it would pass beyond the bounds of a domestic issue and would become a question of foreign policy "of such gravity that upon it the unity of the Empire may founder

¹³ Ibid., p.29.

¹⁴ Hancock, Smuts: The Fields of Force, p.109.

irretrievably".¹⁵ This, as Hancock points out, signaled the reopening of a quarrel which twenty years later was to prove "ruinous" to Smuts.

But by the beginning of the Second World War, having defeated Hertzog's supporters on the issue of neutrality, Smuts's faith in the Commonwealth was undiminished and, in fact, had been greatly enhanced. In January 1940 he was predicting the Commonwealth as "the first tentative beginnings of great things for the future of the World".¹⁶ In 1943, after a dramatic three years of war in which Britain and the Empire had come close to destruction, he recognised that the Commonwealth would emerge materially weakened from the war. This fact had suggested to him a grouping of the states of western Europe with the Commonwealth to form a third force in world affairs between the increasingly powerful United States and Russia.¹⁷

By 1945 it was becoming clear that there was a drift towards a looser form of Commonwealth association. This was demonstrated by the fact that most member countries were opposed to closer forms of co-operation in defence and economic matters. Smuts himself had opposed the idea of a unified General Staff or the revival of the Imperial War Cabinet during the war. He had also rejected the idea of the Labour prime minister, Clement Attlee, that British heavy industry should be shifted for strategic reasons to the dominions (because it implied greater strategic and economic unity).¹⁸

After the United Nations San Francisco conference in 1945, Smuts gave the British high commissioner, Evelyn Baring, an interview in which he outlined his view of international affairs in the

¹⁵ Quoted in Hancock, Smuts: Fields of Force, p.139.

¹⁶ Mansergh, Commonwealth Experience, p.377.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.293.

¹⁸ G. Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in My Time (London, Allen and Unwin, 1961), p.410.

post-war world and expressed his unshaken conviction that the Commonwealth, as a mature institution, with great experience all over the globe, should act as "honest broker" between the inexperienced United States and the Russians.¹⁹ The United Kingdom would have to maintain its leading role in the Commonwealth and in the world at large, he said, in order to prevent "disruptive forces" from gaining an upper hand in the world. He regarded the new Labour leaders in Britain as "good and sincere men"²⁰ but the dangers were their lack of experience and their tendency to see the Russians through "rose-tinted spectacles".²¹ Attlee, though a "good man", "lacked personal vision and the quality of international leadership".

Smuts's view of the Labour government in Britain had been coloured, to some extent, by his strong friendship and identity of views with the war-time Conservative leader, Winston Churchill. The accession of a Labour government had shocked him as much as it had Churchill and it meant a certain reduction of intimacy and the beginnings of a greater degree of formality in the relationship between the new government and South Africa. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that Attlee's government was as strongly pro-Commonwealth and Empire as Churchill's had been. As Bullock points out, Labour's years of coalition with the Tories meant that Commonwealth and Empire were no longer criticized as "imperialism" and were seen instead as providing powerful support to Britain in war.²² Labour realised the Empire's importance as a guarantee of Britain's continued influence as a great power.

The Labour view of self-government and independence differed from

¹⁹ Charles Douglas-Home, Evelyn Baring, the Last Proconsul (London, Collins, 1978), p.143.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p.144.

²² Alan Bullock, Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary. 1945-1951 (London, W.M.Norton, 1983), pp.64-65.

that of the Tories but Attlee did not intend, any less than Churchill, to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire. In any case, it soon became clear how much the new government needed South Africa's economic co-operation within the Commonwealth and Empire. There could be no talk of a lessening of British support for Smuts, who was seen as a loyal Commonwealth statesman, in a period of rising Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa and declining British power and influence in the post-war world.

The dominions, which had emerged from the war greatly strengthened relative to Britain, were even less inclined towards accepting direction from the centre of Empire than before. The signing of military alliances with the United States by some Commonwealth countries after the war reflected this loosening of the Commonwealth strategic relationship. South Africa was no exception to this general trend towards a more decentralised Commonwealth after the war. However, in South Africa certain unique factors existed that were to reinforce the trend towards a more distant and formal relationship with Britain in particular and with the rest of the Commonwealth in general. South Africa's racial policies, the growth of Afrikaner nationalism, Smuts's aims concerning the high commission territories and economic protectionism were factors which contributed to a lessening of the intimacy between Britain and South Africa in this period.

Smuts, described by one commentator as "quintessentially, a pro-Commonwealth man"²³ (in contrast to the Nationalist opposition leader, Dr D.F. Malan, who "initially, at least, was not"), found his government to be on the defensive against attacks from Commonwealth sources in the UNO and even, on occasions, in unofficial Commonwealth conferences. British support for South Africa concerning the "unwritten rule" of non-interference in the

²³ Peter Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies and Attitudes to South Africa, 1948-1991 and beyond" (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1992), Unpublished paper presented to the South African Historical Society Annual Conference, University of Potchefstroom, February, 1993, p.32.

domestic affairs of Commonwealth member states would prove, already in Smuts's post-war premiership, to be inadequate to stem the tide of criticism from India and from other sources (although there was, as yet, no official expression of such views from prime ministers' conferences until the early 1960's).

Chapter 1: Smuts, the Indian Question and the Commonwealth.

Evelyn Baring, the British high commissioner in South Africa from 1944 to 1951, reported to his government in London soon after the war had ended that the real problem facing South Africa was the relationship between "European" and "non-European".¹ According to Baring, the desire of the Nationalist Afrikaners to exclude English speakers from any say in the government of the country was basically related to their desire to have full control over "Native" policy. But he foresaw many problems for Britain in the future relationship with South Africa because of the racial issue and burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism. During his period of office he had had to deal with Smuts's government over the "Indian Question", South West Africa and the issue closest to his own heart, the high commission territories. All of them created special difficulties for Attlee's Labour government and none more so perhaps than the issue of South Africa's treatment of its Indian population. On the Indian issue Smuts's views were seen as only "relatively more liberal" than those of the Nationalists.²

The reaction of individual Commonwealth countries to South Africa's racial policies varied according to the extent to which these policies impacted on certain political, economic and emotional interest in those countries. Thus India, with its descendants bearing some of the brunt of discriminatory laws in South Africa, was inevitably at the forefront of the campaign against South Africa in the UN and in the Commonwealth, at least until Ghana and other African countries joined the organisation. At the other extreme, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, Canada, were anxious to avoid a split in the Commonwealth along racial lines and also not to antagonise South Africa by condemning her racial policies too strongly.

¹ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, pp.146-147.

² Ibid., p.147.

During Smuts's post-war premiership it was the Indian and South West African questions which preoccupied Commonwealth statesmen the most in terms of relations with South Africa. The broader problem of South Africa's treatment of her non-white population in general only attracted attention in the early 1950's when the apartheid item was added to the agenda of the UNO. The Indian and South West African questions created severe problems for South Africa's Commonwealth relations during the immediate post-war years. What appeared at first as a dispute between two member states, India and South Africa, broadened into a question of principle upon which the other countries were forced, however reluctantly, to take sides. In the process, the Commonwealth suffered a blow to its cohesiveness (already weakened by the decentralising tendencies taking place in the economic and military fields). In South Africa the loyalties of many whites and blacks to the Commonwealth were strained and called into question even by some of its most strident supporters. What one commentator had called the "melancholy movement" towards a white consensus on racial matters³ began to supersede ethnic allegiances even during the Smuts period; while among Indians and blacks a sense of betrayal at the hands of the white Commonwealth grew.

It was the Indian question which provided the most important challenge to South Africa's Commonwealth relations in the period of Smuts's post-war premiership. During the Second World War the seeds of the increasingly bitter conflict between India and South Africa had been laid when Smuts introduced the Pegging Act in 1943⁴ which restricted further the residential and trading rights of Indians in the urban areas. The Act was largely a result of the stridently anti-Indian agitation in the ranks of the Natal section of the United Party and from Colonel C.F. Stallard's

³ J.D.B. Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions (London, Chatto and Windus, 1966), p.101.

⁴ M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.II, South Africa 1870-1966 (London, Oxford University Press, 1975), p.457.

Dominion Party. By 1944 it had come to the attention of the Indian legislative assembly and had created a major intra-Commonwealth row that threatened to derail the allied war effort in the Far East. In 1944 resolutions were introduced in the Indian assembly calling for economic sanctions against South Africa. There were also calls for the withdrawal of the Indian high commissioner from the Union and, more significantly, for Britain as the controlling power in India to apply pressure on South Africa to amend its discriminatory laws.⁵

The heated nature of the debates in the Indian legislature in November and December of 1944 is illustrated by some of the speeches made. There were calls for Indian troops "to drive some sense into South African Whites in the way they did to Italians"⁶ and ominous references were made to the future of the Commonwealth and the allied war effort if Britain did not step in to put pressure on South Africa. The deputy leader of the Muslim League Party in the assembly remarked, for example, that he "did not care for the war effort", nor did he care of the "Commonwealth of Nations" if his position in that Commonwealth was to be that of a "hewer of wood and a drawer of water".⁷ He suggested that an ultimatum be sent to the British government to the effect that if they did not exert pressure on the South Africans "India would not give any help in the prosecution of the war".

In the same Indian debate some speakers had noted the role played by "British South Africans" in the agitation for discriminatory laws in South Africa. One member asked whether it was expected of Indians "to have greater regard for the solidarity of the Commonwealth of Nations than those English settlers in Natal

⁵ Indian Opinion, 5 January 1945.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 12 January 1945.

have?"⁸ The Hindustan Times commented that there could be "nothing more damning" than this "open breach between two members of the so-called Commonwealth for which General Smuts was directly responsible".⁹

The way in which the South African government have deliberately gone back on their solemn commitments and are now seeking to oppress and humiliate the coloured races within their territory will remain as one of the most bitter ironies of Empire history. It is curious that neither General Smuts nor the South African Government appear to realise the blatant hypocrisy in talking of fighting for democracy and world peace and at the same time following an unabashed racial policy calculated to crush the Indian community economically and politically.

It is clear that in India South Africa's racial policies had been recognised as a Commonwealth problem of great importance for the post-war period. Smuts (and the British) were to be faced with a seemingly intractable political problem that promised to disturb the functioning and co-operation of the Commonwealth in the crucial years immediately after the war. It would prove to be difficult to maintain the unwritten Commonwealth code of non-interference in domestic affairs of member states in the face of anti-racialist feeling in India and elsewhere.

An example of this was soon provided. In February 1945 it was announced that representations regarding the position of Indians in South Africa would be made to the Commonwealth relations conference in London. Although this was to be an unofficial conference with no decision-making powers (unlike prime ministers' conferences), considerable publicity was given to its discussions and Indian Opinion claimed that "Never at any time

⁸ Ibid., 5 January 1945.

⁹ Quoted in Indian Opinion, 12 January 1945.

has the case of Indians been placed as strongly as it was placed before the Commonwealth of Nations on the present occasion."¹⁰ The Indian representative at the conference was quoted as saying that "unless visible steps were taken to put an end to the present inequalities from which Indians suffered [in South Africa] the Commonwealth would one day split". It was, however, also recognised in the official communique at the end of the conference that if the British were to attempt to bring pressure to bear on the South Africa it would mean "repudiating one of the basic principles on which the Commonwealth rested".¹¹

Britain's response to the dispute between India and South Africa was from the beginning one of strict non-intervention. On 27 April 1945 the secretary of state for India, L.S. Amery, stated in the House of Commons that as far as Britain was concerned "the matter is entirely one for the Government of India".¹² This statement was noted unfavourably in South Africa by Indian Opinion which asked what Britain and other allied nations would do "if the settlers enforce their anti-Indian policy which closely resembles Hitler's anti-Jewish policy?...Racial intolerance is as undesirable in South Africa as in Germany".¹³

As one commentator has noted, the clash between South Africa and the Asian Commonwealth left Britain in an "invidious position".¹⁴ It symbolised the "clash of loyalty to an old Dominion versus the demands of newly independent states". The British response was to try to maintain the unity of the Commonwealth by means of a delicate balancing act between those who advocated a strong

¹⁰ Ibid., 16 March 1945.

¹¹ Ibid., 13 April 1945.

¹² Ibid., 27 April 1945.

¹³ Ibid., 18 May 1945.

¹⁴ J. Barber and J. Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy. The Search for Status and Security, 1945-1988 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.26.

line against South Africa and those who wished to continue with a form of official neutrality but discreet support for the Smuts government. At cabinet level the two sides were represented by the India office and the colonial office (CO), on the one hand, and the dominions office (DO), or after 1949 the Commonwealth relations office (CRO), on the other.

Usually the views of the dominions secretaries (Viscount Addison, Philip Noel-Baker and Patrick Gordon Walker, during the Labour government's period of office) prevailed and were strongly influenced by representations from the high commissioner in South Africa, Evelyn Baring. The strategic and economic value of the South African connection was valued so highly that Attlee's labour government was prepared to place a higher priority on Smuts's continued co-operation in the Commonwealth than the need to mollify India's outraged feelings, even in the crucial period leading up to Indian independence in 1947.

As Pelling has pointed out, the difficulties and constraints under which the post-war Labour government operated in the economic, military and diplomatic fields led to a dilution of socialist principles and an inevitable dependence on the United States.¹⁵ Commonwealth and colonial issues did not always receive the undivided attention of the government and after India had announced its republican intentions not all members of the Commonwealth affairs' committee of cabinet were "equally enthusiastic about the desirability of keeping the [Commonwealth] association in existence".¹⁶ The India secretary, F.W. Pethick-Lawrence (1945-46) was noted as being "too old and too gentlemanly" (by Lord Wavell)¹⁷ and was not prepared to press his opposition to South Africa to the point of creating a breach with his colleagues. Pelling notes that there was a lack of concern

¹⁵ Henry Pelling, The Labour Governments, 1945-51 (London, Macmillan, 1984), p.266.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.162.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.149.

with "black-white issues" in the immediate post-war period and that Labour was more worried, for instance, about the effect on South Africa if E. Shinwell, a Jewish cabinet minister, was shifted from the electricity and power portfolio to the Commonwealth relations portfolio than about broader racial issues.¹⁸

The rationale for British non-intervention in South Africa's race policies was usually couched in terms of the Commonwealth non-interference rule or in terms of Article 2(7) of the UN Charter. The communique at the end of the 1945 Commonwealth relations conference had expressed this principle but as the dispute between India and South Africa intensified it became more difficult for Britain and other Commonwealth countries to maintain a strictly neutral stance. In 1946 the Indian government brought the dispute to the United Nations for the first time (in response to the passing of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act in South Africa).

Smuts's high commissioner in London, G. Heaton Nicholls, predicted that the British would be sympathetic to the Indian complaint "since they will wish to do nothing which will in the least antagonise the newly formed Indian Government in the early stages of its authority".¹⁹ He felt that if South Africa were to stand firm on her "legal rights" under Article 2(7) the UNO would be confined to a discussion of the legal and procedural aspects.

On both counts he was wrong, however, for as it turned out Britain supported South Africa in the domestic jurisdiction argument but the General Assembly threw out the request by South Africa to refer the dispute to the International Court. It declared instead that friendly relations had been impaired

¹⁸ Ibid., p.181.

¹⁹ Transvaal Archives Depot (TA), J.C. Smuts Collection (JCS), B.(Public papers, Union of South Africa papers), Vol.165, May-September 1946, No.62, Telegram, High Commissioner, London - Acting Prime Minister, Pretoria, August 1946.

between states and that both countries should abide by the Cape Town Agreement of 1927.²⁰ It also claimed that the treatment of Indians in South Africa came within the provisions of the UN Charter.

The British cabinet discussions of the India-South Africa dispute (and the South West Africa problem which paralleled it at that time) reveal one important policy motivation prevailing above all others: that is, the desire not to offend Smuts's government to the point that it would consider leaving the Commonwealth. The dominions office seems to have been convinced that the latter was a very real possibility even under a government as friendly to the Commonwealth as that of General Smuts's.²¹

Addison argued in a memorandum prepared for his cabinet colleagues on 21 October 1946 that Britain should support South Africa's domestic jurisdiction argument at the UNO because "complete silence" on the issue would "inevitably cause resentment in the Union and would be highly prejudicial to our relations with the Union Government".²² In contrast the India secretary, Pethick-Lawrence, argued that "absolute neutrality" was necessary in order to make the Indian government believe that "there is room for India within the British Commonwealth on a

²⁰ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign policy, p.25.

²¹ Even before the Indian complaint at the UNO had been laid a despatch from Baring to Addison at the end of 1945 predicted that relations with South Africa would pass through a "critical phase" in the "next few years" largely as a result of the growth of Afrikaner nationalism. It also expressed concern at the problem of a successor to Smuts. Addison enclosed the despatch for cabinet perusal and discussion. (Public Record Office (PRO), London, Cabinet Office (CAB) Papers 129/2, Cabinet Memoranda, 6 September - 10 October 1945, C.P.(45)179, "Political Affairs in South Africa." Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 18 September 1945).

²² PRO, CAB 129/13, C.P.(46)394, "General Assembly of the United Nations: Indian Complaint Against South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 21 October 1946.

basis of equality and community of interests".²³

On 25 October the British cabinet decided to support South Africa's domestic jurisdiction case despite arguments from Pethick-Lawrence to the effect that Indians would regard such support as direct opposition to them.²⁴ It was also decided to inform the Indian delegation in advance of the British line at UNO and to instruct British delegates "to avoid expressing any views on the merits of the dispute" unofficially and officially.

On 4 November the matter was discussed again by cabinet by which time it had become clear that feelings in the General Assembly were against the domestic jurisdiction argument. Pethick-Lawrence again argued for a policy of abstention in the debate saying that if the British delegation took a line that was unfavourable to the Indian case "there would be serious repercussions in India".²⁵ Addison, in contrast, again stressed the importance of British support for the domestic jurisdiction argument and argued that if the Assembly did not accept it, the International Court would have to make a decision.

The cabinet again came down on Addison's side. The feeling was expressed that it was important to "avoid setting a precedent for intervention by the UNO in matter like this, which had hitherto been regarded as within the domestic jurisdiction of sovereign states". It was also noted that the USA, with its "Negro Question" and India, with its "differential treatment" of various communities, should "see the importance of this". British delegates should be made aware of the "possible repercussions on India herself and on other parts of the British Commonwealth if it were held that the United Nations was competent to intervene

²³ CAB 129/13, C.P.(46)397, 23 October 1946.

²⁴ CAB 128/6 (Cabinet conclusions: 1 July - 31 December 1946), C.M.91(46)3, "United Nations: Indian Complaint against South Africa", 25 October 1946.

²⁵ C.M.94(46)1, 4 November 1946.

in matters of this kind".²⁶

When the matter came before the General Assembly on 8 December for a final vote, it decided by 32 votes to 15 with 7 abstentions to reject the South African domestic jurisdiction argument.²⁷ Of the Commonwealth countries, New Zealand and Canada supported the British vote in favour of South Africa while Australia abstained and India voted against South Africa. The British foreign minister, Ernest Bevin, noted that India had won a "moral victory" but that the UNO discussions "might have served a useful purpose" by bringing home to the South African government "the strength of feeling in the world about their native policy".²⁸

Britain's position on this first UN resolution on South Africa's racial policies was widely reported and commented upon in South Africa and may be presumed to have symbolised in the public eye the "Commonwealth" attitude towards South Africa (which, of course, invoked very different responses among the country's various communities). The attitude of the other Commonwealth countries, although noted, was not as widely commented upon.

Among the Indian community in South Africa the British and other "white" Commonwealth countries' support for South Africa's position had been noted as early as May 1946 when the Indian complaint had been lodged at UNO. In that month Indian Opinion predicted that the British and dominion delegations to the UN were likely to argue that the Indian question was a domestic matter "concerning only the South African government".²⁹ It also reported an editorial from the Hindu of Madras accusing Britain of not saying anything in protest to South Africa and of using the "excuse" of the dominions being "sovereign states". In June

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ T.B. Millar, The Commonwealth and the United Nations (Sydney, Sydney University Press, 1967), p.141.

²⁸ PRO, CAB 128/9, C.M.1(47)4, 2 January 1947.

²⁹ Indian Opinion, 3 May 1946.

1946 Indian Opinion stated that the British government, by claiming non-interference in the domestic affairs of South Africa, "has committed the gravest betrayal in history" and hoped that the Indian delegation to UNO would ensure that the British "toe the line with them".³⁰ The latter hope proved to be illusory and in December Indian Opinion joined the growing call among African and Indian organisations for a boycott of the royal tour of South Africa scheduled to begin in January 1947.

The English-speaking press in South Africa generally supported Smuts's domestic jurisdiction argument but the Natal Mercury had expected Britain and the United States to apply pressure on South Africa and warned that such pressure would be resented.³¹ The Sunday Times, under the heading "No Appeasing the East", noted that South Africa was in the "uncomfortable" position "of being alone in a world of colour" and lamented that "no one ...understands our problem".³² But it expressed relief that "we had enough friends with the required diplomatic skill to get the Indian Question shelved for a period". A week later it noted that Australia "curiously abstained" on the vote and explained it by presuming that a certain Mr Makin, the chief Australian delegate to the UN, had felt that a vote in favour would have "prejudiced Australia's trusteeship agreement for New Guinea".³³

Thus there was considerable relief when it became clear that most of the white Commonwealth was behind Smuts at the UNO and that a measure of Commonwealth unity had been preserved. The prospect of imminent Indian independence within the Commonwealth had not been greeted with equanimity in the English South African community and the developments in the UNO in 1946 added to their sense of disquiet. Smuts had to mollify these fears with

³⁰ Indian Opinion, 7 June 1946.

³¹ Reported by Indian Opinion, 15 February 1946.

³² Sunday Times, 8 December 1946.

³³ Sunday Times, 15 December 1946.

statements to the effect that South Africa's race policies would not be discussed formally in the Commonwealth and that whenever pressure had been exerted at Commonwealth conferences the response had always been clear:

Namely, that we in South Africa did not recognise equal rights, that we did not recognise such a thing and had never recognised it and would never recognise it.³⁴

Whether such reassurances had any effect on white voters' attitudes to the Commonwealth connection is difficult to gauge. National Party supporters remained hostile to the Empire and the Commonwealth for reasons which went far beyond the immediate post-war crisis in South Africa's race relations and, in any case, preferred not to distinguish between the concepts of "Empire" and "Commonwealth". The latter was seen by republicans as a disguised form of British imperialism.³⁵

African opinion, while not commenting directly on the role of Britain and the dominions in protecting South Africa in the UNO during the Smuts premiership, made it clear that Britain would continue to lose the trust and goodwill of the black population if the British government did not play a more active part in the struggle for human rights in South Africa. As we shall see later, the royal tour of 1947 offered the best opportunity to express these views. Organisations such as the African National Congress and its South African Indian Congress ally decided to boycott the tour in protest against Smuts's policies.

³⁴ Quoted in Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.26.

³⁵ See, for example, the views of Eric Louw, the future economic affairs minister in Malan's government, in his article "The Republican Issue in South African Politics. The National Party Viewpoint", Eric Louw Collection (PV 4), Institute of Contemporary History (INCH), Bloemfontein, File No.71 (Published articles), 1947, p.7.

The leading moderate organ of African opinion in the townships, Bantu World, also warned on a number of occasions that Britain was likely to lose the affection of blacks if a sufficiently strong stand in opposition to Smuts's policies was not taken. An editorial in June 1945 claimed that Britain, because of the war, had "forgotten her mission in Africa, a policy which made her the hope of the oppressed and the despair of the oppressor".³⁶ It argued that racial discrimination in South Africa had caused a school of thought to arise which called for "Africa for the Africans" and reminded Britain of her paramount aim in Africa of developing the peoples for self-government. In somewhat stronger terms, the Youth League of the ANC declared a year later that the only "true antidote" to imperialism in Africa was a "national awakening among Africans".³⁷ In 1946 the ANC and SAIC chose the UN as their forum of appeal against the Smuts government and the speech by Dr A.B. Xuma, president of the ANC to the General Assembly, gave considerable embarrassment to Smuts who was attending the same session of the world body.³⁸

³⁶ Bantu World, 2 June 1945.

³⁷ T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964, Vol.2, T.Karis, Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952 (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1973), p.317.

³⁸ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.21.

Chapter 2: South West Africa, the High Commission Territories and Other Issues

(a) South West Africa

The South West Africa dispute represented Smuts's second nemesis at the UN in the years immediately after the war. Once again Britain and the Commonwealth were faced with a problem in their relations with South Africa that held wider implications for their dealings with colonial peoples, trust territories and world opinion. Once again Britain came down on South Africa's side (after some initial hesitation) and much the same reasons for supporting the South African case were advanced: the need to retain Smuts's friendship and co-operation in the Commonwealth and in bilateral dealings with Britain.

In April 1946 Addison argued that there was a good case for Commonwealth support of South Africa's desire to incorporate South West Africa in view of the territory's proximity to South Africa and the "desire of the European population to annex the territory".¹ So far as the United Kingdom was concerned

it is of great political importance to maintain cordial relations with the South African Government on this question.

Unexpectedly, however, strong criticism of the South African position had come from New Zealand at San Francisco in 1945 and again at the first session of the UN General Assembly in January 1946. The Labour Party prime minister, Peter Fraser, had stated at San Francisco that all powers holding mandated territories should "as the test of sincerity demands...acknowledge the

¹ PRO, CAB 129/9, C.P.(46)157, "Trusteeship", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 10 January 1946.

supervision of the Trusteeship Council".² In January 1946 Fraser condemned South Africa's announcement to the UN that the opinions of the inhabitants of the territory would be canvassed. He said that it had never at any time been suggested or recognised that mandated territories belonged to the mandated powers.³

Fraser's stand was based partly on liberal conviction and partly on his political commitment to place the New Zealand mandate of Western Samoa under the Trusteeship system of the UN. New Zealand had been one of the first mandatory powers to place her island mandate under trusteeship and her government felt bound by pledges made during the war to advance the territory towards self-government. South Africa's response was dismissive: Heaton Nicholls, who represented the Union at the first sessions on trusteeship noted that

the little Western Samoan mandate held by New Zealand was merely a hothouse of tropical administration ... and if there was one spot in the world where harmonious and civilised advancement under trusteeship could be speedily effected it was in Western Samoa.⁴

The view of the Smuts government was that South West Africa was a special case in view of its size and strategic importance as well as the "primitive" state of its inhabitants. Annexation was seen as the only logical course following on the demise of the League and was regarded almost as a matter of right for South Africa. The British view was similar, although Attlee's colonial secretary, G.D. Hall, expressed contrary opinions during the April 1946 cabinet discussions on the issue. Hall argued that it was "unwise" to support South Africa in view of the fact that

² Quoted in the Report of the New Zealand Delegation on the Proceedings and Decisions of the United Nations Conference On International Organisation, Department of External Affairs Publication No.11. (Wellington, 1945), p.70.

³ Auckland Star, 22 January 1946.

⁴ Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in My Time, p.399.

the South African line had been much criticised at the United Nations and in view of New Zealand's criticisms which had also been rather strongly announced by Peter Fraser, the New Zealand Prime Minister.⁵

Hall argued further that liberal opinion in Britain would not accept South Africa's argument and that the French would be all the more "difficult to resist" over their desire to incorporate Togoland and the Cameroons.

After taking these arguments into account and those of Addison (in favour of South Africa), the British cabinet decided that it would be "more reasonable" to support South Africa's case if the consent of the "Native" as well as the European population had been sought and obtained by methods agreeable to the United Nations. It was advised that discussions with Smuts at the next prime ministers' conference would be held on these lines.

Addison reported on 13 May that he had spoken with Smuts and that he had been "glad" to find that Britain had the support of "at least some of the other Dominions"⁶ on the South West Africa issue. He claimed that only the Herero tribe seemed to be opposed to incorporation although some opposition had come from the Bechuanaland Protectorate in the form of Chief Tshekedi of the Bamangwato tribe. The latter had claimed that the incorporation of South West Africa would create a "precedent" for incorporation of the high commission territories. Nevertheless, said Addison, the balance was in favour of incorporation and "our support of General Smuts in this matter would strengthen his hand against the secessionists in South Africa whose activities were causing

⁵ PRO, CAB 128/5, C.M.37(46) 3, "Colonial Trusteeship", 24 April 1946.

⁶ PRO, CAB 128/5, C.M.45(46)8, "South West Africa", 13 May 1946.

him considerable difficulty".⁷

Addison's reference to Smuts's difficulties with "secessionists" in the Union was to become a familiar refrain in discussions by British officials in South Africa. It was mainly inspired by the British high commissioner in South Africa, Evelyn Baring, who had noted in a despatch to the dominions office the strength of the "extremist" republican faction under the Transvaal leader, J.G. Strijdom, in the National Party.⁸ The argument was frequently expounded thereafter that unless Smuts and, later, Malan, were given crucial British support on certain issues such as South West Africa, Strijdom's faction would gain the upper hand and Britain would lose South Africa's co-operation on other broader Commonwealth issues.

In the case of South West Africa, Addison's assumption was that by supporting Smuts the extreme republicans would modify their demands for a republic outside the Commonwealth. He encountered some opposition in the British cabinet from the colonial secretary, Hall, who noted that "there was much concern in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and in other territories against South Africa's Native policies and in Africa as a whole".⁹ Smuts "might not get a majority in the General Assembly" and "India might well object on account of her troubles with South Africa". The foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, also thought the case against South Africa was "very strong" and that the cabinet should not commit itself in support of the proposal at that stage.

On that occasion (13 May 1946) the cabinet decided that it would only support South Africa's case if the consent of the "Natives" as well as the Europeans in South West Africa had been obtained "in ways agreeable to the United Nations". But two weeks later Addison's advice was accepted to the effect that the Bamangwato

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ PRO, CAB 129/6, C.P.(46)12, 10 January 1946.

⁹ CAB 128/5, C.M.45(46)8, "South West Africa", 13 May 1946.

Chief Tshekedi should be warned not to come to London to make representations against the South African case.¹⁰ The reasons given by Addison were significant. Smuts would "take great exception" to such a visit and it "might very well raise the very question of incorporation in the Union of the high commission territories which Tshekedi was anxious to avoid". In other words, the cabinet was being advised to mollify Smuts on one issue, South West Africa, in order to avoid problems over another, the high commission territories.

In October 1946 Smuts put some pressure on the British government to amend its formula on consultation of native opinion in South West Africa. He asked his high commissioner in London, Heaton Nicholls, to "assist" the British Government in framing a reply to a parliamentary question concerning Britain's attitude to the proposed referendum in the territory.¹¹ He noted that the attitude of the British government

generally...is unsatisfactory and if known in Union will cause much mischief. Incidentally it would increase the pressure for immediate incorporation of Protectorates. A hint by you might be helpful.

The hint was taken up by Addison who argued in a cabinet memorandum of 8 October that the previous formula concerning South West Africa adopted by cabinet had been rendered "inappropriate" and that the South African government had given the British "full and frank information".¹² He asked cabinet to agree that Smuts's methods of consultation of the inhabitants of

¹⁰ CAB 128/5, C.M.52(46)4, "South West Africa: Proposed Visit by Chief Tshekedi to London", 27 May 1946.

¹¹ TA, JCS, B.(Union of South Africa Papers), Vol.166 (October - December 1946), No.17, Smuts - Heaton Nicholls, 7 October 1946.

¹² PRO, CAB 129/13, C.P.(46) 371, "South West Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 8 October, 1946.

South West Africa were "agreeable" to Britain and to instruct the United Kingdom delegation in New York "to state its support for the South African case". He noted that

South Africa might not get her way at the United Nations General Assembly...but if they do not, it is of the highest importance to our relations with them that they should not feel that their lack of success was in any degree due to our failure to do all that we reasonably could on their behalf.

At the cabinet meeting of 10 October, however, not much support was in evidence for Addison's line. "Serious doubts" were expressed about the expediency of "committing ourselves at this stage" to support the South African government.¹³ It was noted that there were no independent observers of Smuts's proposed referendum and that it would be "an embarrassing precedent if we say it was sufficient consultation". The cabinet felt that while it was important to avoid "embarrassment" to South Africa, the problem was how "to secure this without causing themselves embarrassment in other directions". It was decided therefore to gain time for discussions with Smuts by postponing a reply to the parliamentary question on the issue and by trying to have it withdrawn from the Order Paper.

By the time the issue was next discussed the British government had reached consensus on a position that was much more in favour of the South African line. Once again it seems that Smuts's intervention was decisive. Addison told the cabinet on 18 October that he had discussed the matter with Smuts and with Attlee.¹⁴ Smuts had told him that he regarded it as unacceptable that the UN should prescribe the method of consultation with the inhabitants and had said that he intended to press forward with

¹³ CAB 128/9, C.M.85(46)5, "South West Africa", 10 October 1946.

¹⁴ CAB 128/9, C.M.88(46)2, "South West Africa", 18 October 1946.

incorporation "whatever was said in the United Nations General Assembly". This time, with little discussion, the cabinet came to the conclusion that

it was inexpedient to refrain from supporting the South African case since it was just a notification of the wishes of the inhabitants and not a support for the South African case in advance.

It was also noted that South Africa was prepared to continue to "observe the principles of the mandate system in its administration of the territory".

The British had misjudged the temper and mood of the General Assembly, however. On 14 December 1946 it voted 37 to 0 with 9 abstentions on a resolution to the effect that it was unable to accede to the incorporation of South West Africa into the Union. Instead the assembly recommended trusteeship for the territory under UN supervision.¹⁵ Of the Commonwealth countries, India and Canada voted against South Africa while Britain, Australia and New Zealand abstained. The vote, together with that on the Indian question, had shaken Smuts's faith in the UN. But the tacit support of most of the dominions was some comfort to him.

As was the case with the Indian question and, later, the apartheid issue, the "white" dominions usually kept in step with Britain at the UN, at least until anti-colonial sentiment had become overwhelming in the early 1960's. In the case of New Zealand, which had initially given strong opposition to South Africa over South West Africa, the development of the Cold War and the need to show solidarity with the other administering powers in the Trusteeship Council came to outweigh questions of principle. Sir Alistair McIntosh, the external affairs department secretary in New Zealand under Fraser's government, wrote that

¹⁵ Millar, Commonwealth and United Nations, p.174.

Fraser always thought the South Africans were wrong but as the Cold War developed we found ourselves having to support the other Trusteeship powers on many issue on legal grounds against the USSR - even though we acted very differently in Samoa.¹⁶

In those early years, the UN meetings of Commonwealth representatives were held each week when the General Assembly was in session and members could test the reactions of other Commonwealth countries to proposed courses of action.¹⁷ Compromise resolutions could be agreed upon which some Commonwealth representatives would abstain from rather than casting a negative vote. India also took part in these meetings and, on South African issues, was prepared to co-operate with the rest of the Commonwealth. A British cabinet memorandum which summarised the proceedings of the UN General Assembly for the year 1947 noted that:

Even in the disagreeable South African business the Indians behaved with great moderation and kept us informed all the time of what they were going to do.¹⁸

Thus, Commonwealth membership helped to mitigate (from the South African government's view) the harshness of the Indian attacks against South Africa in the UN. It is significant also that after Indian independence in 1947, Jawarhal Nehru, the first prime minister, opposed calls from some members of his parliament to leave the Commonwealth or to apply pressure on South Africa at Commonwealth conferences. Nehru was aware of the precedent that such pressure could give in the case of India's own difficulties

¹⁶ Letter to the author, 26 September 1978.

¹⁷ Leslie Munro, "The Commonwealth's Unomanship", Commonwealth Journal, Vol.4, No.2, April 1961, p.59.

¹⁸ PRO, CAB 129/22, C.P.(47)335, "Proceedings of the General Assembly of the United Nations, 1947", Memorandum by the Minister of State, 17 December 1947.

over the question of Kashmir.¹⁹

(b) Smuts and post-war South African expansionism

Smuts had long harboured the idea of extending South African influence northwards over territories which were mainly British colonies and protectorates.²⁰ He did not see this aim as being in any way antagonistic to British policy for the African colonies but rather saw it as being complementary to that policy. Smuts had envisaged a partnership between Britain and South Africa in the establishment of larger and therefore more efficient groupings of territories within the Empire in general and in Africa in particular.

During World War II Smuts had elaborated on the idea in a speech in which he suggested that the dominions should participate in the control of colonial territories which were adjacent to or geographically near to them.²¹ In parliament in 1945 he explained further that this suggestion did not mean annexation of such territories and Africans in those territories "had to get it out of their heads that we want to absorb them, that we are out for annexation and to dominate".²² Instead he compared his ideas to the Pan-American Union in South America, meeting every year to discuss "general interests". He admitted there was a big difference in "native policies" in the northern states compared to South Africa but claimed that Africans "were rushing to work in South Africa" and that "nothing like as so much is done for the material development of the natives as we are doing in South Africa". In response to Dr Malan's assertion that he was heading

¹⁹ J.D.B. Miller, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs. Problems of Expansion and Attrition, 1953-1969 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974), p.129.

²⁰ R. Hyam, The Failure of South African Expansion 1908-1948 (New York, Africana, 1972), p.23.

²¹ Hancock, Smuts: Fields of Force, p.407.

²² House of Assembly Debates, col.3951, 22 March 1945.

for a clash with Britain over colonial policy, he stated that although his views were not always in agreement with British policy in Africa which "sometimes left much to be desired", he was supported in his idea of larger groupings of colonies by the then colonial secretary, Oliver Stanley.

Smuts's plans had also always envisaged the incorporation of the high commission territories but in this aim he had encountered some opposition from Britain. The British had always based their response to South African incorporation demands on the clauses in the Act of Union which had insisted on consultation with the inhabitants and with the British parliament before any decision could be made. In the 1930's a deal had come close to being made with Hertzog but increasingly unsympathetic public opinion in Britain together with the passing of the Hertzog Bills disenfranchising Cape "native" voters had caused a postponement of any British decision.²³

Smuts had made two further appeals to Britain for incorporation, one on the eve of World War II and the other during the war, but on both occasions Britain had said that it had to postpone a reply until hostilities were over. Hyam notes the "shock" with which these requests were received in Britain, the government thinking the whole matter was in abeyance because of preoccupation with the war.²⁴ The problem for Britain was much greater with Smuts than with Hertzog because of Smuts's status in Britain. Smuts, in turn, thought the possibility of obtaining at least one territory, Swaziland, was high, and that Britain would not oppose him because of the South African war effort. It would also help him in his battle with the "secessionist" Nationalists who saw the continued existence of the territories as an infringement of South Africa's sovereignty. He was encouraged in his belief by the attitude of Lord Harlech, British high commissioner from 1941 to 1944, who thought it better to

²³ See Hyam, The Failure, ch.7 and ch.8.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.163-164.

make a deal with Smuts than with republican Nationalists over Swaziland.

Soon after taking office in 1944, Baring, the new high commissioner, had to report on several speeches by Smuts which demonstrated a desire to incorporate the territories once the war was over. He wrote to Lord Cranbourne, dominions secretary in April 1945, saying that Smuts had used the question of their migrant labour as a justification for transfer but a counter argument by Baring pointed out that the flow of Irish workers to Glasgow did not justify annexation of Ireland to Scotland.²⁵

Although Baring felt it necessary not to sacrifice the territories to a desire for good relations with Smuts's United Party government, he was aware of the difficulties of reconciling "a proper native policy with keeping on good terms with English speaking South Africa".²⁶ He reported to the dominions office in September 1945 that every educated African that he had met in the Union opposed transfer and he intended to use that fact to press home the argument. Before he left office Cranbourne wrote to Baring to say that he was not sure of the future of the territories and that he had always thought it possible to do a deal with South Africa over Swaziland at least and that it would be difficult to refuse Smuts after all he had done for Britain during the war.²⁷

Smuts's aims in respect of the high commission territories did not differ much from the Nationalists, except, as Hyam points out, in the question of timing.²⁸ The Nationalists could not wait while Smuts's reply was that "At the right time, if I am there

²⁵ Douglas-Home, The Last Pro-consul, p.165.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.165-6.

²⁸ Hyam, Failure, p.177.

I shall tackle the matter and try to dispose of it."²⁹

Soon after Labour took over, Attlee answered a question in the Commons in a way which showed no enthusiasm for transfer at least until Britain had satisfied itself about Union native policy.³⁰ Attlee's government was "kept on its toes" by the left-wing section of his party and by the Anti-Slavery Society, the Aborigines Protectionist Society and by petitions and memoranda received from Africans in South Africa.³¹ During the war and immediately after the ANC had voiced its concern that Britain might hand over the high commission territories to South Africa³². Dr Xuma of the ANC had personally stated his opposition to transfer to Baring in 1945 by arguing that if Britain caved in on the issue it would be taken by Africans to imply

a tacit acknowledgement of the soundness of Union Native policy; would strengthen the hand of those that favour that policy and hasten on its evil consequences.³³

Bantu World published, during the royal tour of 1947, a plea to Britain not to hand over the protectorates³⁴ and its editor noted during the tour of Basutoland that Basuto loyalty to the crown was a result of their being "saved from European occupation by

²⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.4026, 21 March 1946.

³⁰ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.166.

³¹ Hyam, Failure, p.177.

³² This was mentioned in the document summarising African political and economic rights which was drawn up by the ANC during the war. It was entitled "Africans' Claims in South Africa" (Karis, Hope and Challenge, p.213).

³³ PRO, CAB 129/6, C.P.(46)12, "Political Affairs in South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 10 January 1946.

³⁴ Bantu World, 22 March 1947.

the protecting hand of Britain". (The Basuto paramount's speech in welcome to the king had been watered down by Union officials because it had produced what was seen as a strong and embarrassing plea for British protection from the Union to continue).³⁵

As Douglas-Home points out:

One notices in all the official documents of the day that the hypothetical possibility of transfer and the soundness of its juridical basis were still respected. This was in spite of the fact that it was being made clear... that, in Southern African terms, transfer was inconceivable to all blacks.³⁶

But the British never wanted to spell this out for fear of offending Smuts or undermining his position and inducing an incoming Nationalist government to take over the territories by force or by economic blockade - which Britain was powerless to prevent. A 1946 Draft White Paper in response to South Africa's demands would not commit itself to an answer if consultation unearthed a negative opinion in the territories and was as lacking in a categorical refusal to allow transfer as most British responses. This was a result of "weakness on the ground", and desire not to "make life more difficult" for Smuts. (The issue of the various gold and uranium agreements was another factor).³⁷

Smuts appears not to have pressed the issue with Britain before he left office in 1948, perhaps because he realised the strength of feeling against transfer and did not want to embarrass his Commonwealth ally. One of his last comments on the question came in 1950 when, as leader of the opposition, he advised his friend

³⁵ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.153.

³⁶ Ibid., p.166.

³⁷ Ibid., p.168.

Churchill not to provoke Malan over the Seretse Khama affair (see chapter 5) and claimed it would harden public opinion behind Malan's aim of incorporating the protectorates. If this aim were refused, he said, the "extreme course of declaring South Africa a republic would at once become a live issue".³⁸ This advice reinforced British perceptions of the need to appease the Nationalists and thus prevent a clash with Malan that could, in their eyes, have led to South Africa leaving the Commonwealth.

(c) Smuts and Nationalist opposition to a centralised Commonwealth

At the end of the Second World War Smuts had felt that the bonds between the Commonwealth countries were stronger than ever and that the sort of intimate and almost unquestioning co-operation that had been achieved between them would continue into the post-war period.³⁹ What he did not bargain for, however, was an aggressively questioning National Party opposition which was determined to ensure that the country would not continue to be tied down, both economically and militarily, to the detested "Empire". Smuts found himself on the defensive in parliament by having to deny that South Africa was committed to a military alliance with Britain. From some of his own front benches, however, he found himself to be under fire for not doing enough to promote Empire defence while English-language newspapers, such as The Star, called for greater co-operation with Commonwealth countries in general.⁴⁰

Smuts had never believed in a centralised Commonwealth and had opposed the idea of an imperial General Staff during the Second

³⁸ J. Van der Poel (ed), Selections from the Smuts Papers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973), Vol.7, No.878, Smuts - Churchill, 16 March 1950, p.358.

³⁹ N. Mansergh, Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs 1931-1952, Vol.1 (London, OUP, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1952), p.568.

⁴⁰ The Star, 14 February 1945.

World War. The Nationalists, however, accused him in 1945 of discussing a "new Commonwealth unity approach" at Commonwealth conferences and plans for a "Commonwealth General Staff in peace and war".⁴¹ In 1947, F.C. Erasmus, the opposition spokesman on defence, alleged that Smuts had discussed "agreements in relation to common plans" at the 1946 Commonwealth conference.⁴² In reply Smuts claimed that he had only discussed matters which had arisen out of the war and that "no future plans and no new obligations were discussed".⁴³ The opposition leader, D.F. Malan, asked him if there had been any "violation" of South Africa's "right to neutrality" at the conference and Smuts replied that there had been none at all and that all that had been discussed was the share that the dominions might have to bear in defending themselves in future.⁴⁴

These remarks indicate the sensitivity with which any military co-operation with Britain and the Empire was viewed in Nationalist circles. It was, in retrospect, ironic considering the later attempts of the National Party government to make military alliances with the West and with Britain in particular. In 1947, however, Britain was still regarded as an "enemy" by many Nationalists and the right-wing Afrikaans newspaper under Dr H.F. Verwoerd's editorship, Die Transvaler, protested in that year against the visit of Field Marshal Montgomery to the Union. It criticised the "secret machinations of General Smuts" ("die geheime konkelwerk van Generaal Smuts").⁴⁵ In 1948 Malan again asked Smuts about his attitude to Commonwealth centralisation in the light of a speech made in the British parliament a few days previously calling for a "supreme council" for the Empire. Smuts stated in reply that the speech was only calling for closer

⁴¹ House of Assembly Debates, col.3716, 19 March 1945.

⁴² Ibid., cols. 2463-2465, 10 April 1947.

⁴³ Ibid., col.2264, 14 April 1947.

⁴⁴ Ibid., col.2662, 14 April 1947.

⁴⁵ Die Transvaler, 9 October 1947.

relations within the Commonwealth and that his government was "completely against" the proposal for a supreme council.⁴⁶

Smuts's visit to the preparatory conference of the UN in San Francisco in 1945 and his alleged support for a Commonwealth "unity" approach had also been discussed in parliament. Nationalist MPs suggested that he would go to San Francisco with a ready-made plan for greater Commonwealth unity and that the plan had been hatched at the "Caucus Conference" of Commonwealth prime ministers that preceded the San Francisco meeting.⁴⁷

From the left benches of parliament, however, came a differently worded attack on Smuts's attendance at San Francisco. Senator H.M. Basner, the natives' representative for Transvaal and Orange Free State, stated that the British Empire had been founded on "the exploitation of the coloured people" and that Smuts should go to San Francisco with the aim of making the Empire "adjust to the new world" and of working out a plan whereby "economic justice could be accorded to the coloured races of the world".⁴⁸ The Bantu World, for its part, welcomed the call by "Negroes" of America for the San Francisco conference to outlaw racial discrimination in the USA, South Africa and India.⁴⁹ It also reported Dr Xuma's statement that Smuts would be "committing all of South Africa, Black and White" at the San Francisco deliberations and that there was all the more reason for Africans to "place their full confidence upon their true leaders to champion their cause and protect their interests".⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Department of External Affairs Policy Review No.1, March 1948, p.4 (TA, Charles te Water Collection , A78, Vol.4. Union External Policy, File AE 2/1/1, External Affairs Dept. Policy Reviews).

⁴⁷ House of Assembly Debates, col.3716, 19 March 1945.

⁴⁸ Senate Debates, col.618-619, 23 March 1945.

⁴⁹ Bantu World, 28 April 1945.

⁵⁰ Bantu World, 19 May 1945.

The role of Smuts at San Francisco in helping to draft the preamble to the Charter and thus, ironically, committing South Africa to obey all the liberal provisions concerning human rights, has been frequently commented upon. Nevertheless, the accusation from the Nationalists in South Africa that he would go to the conference with a well-worked out plan for Commonwealth unity is not justified by the record of his statements at the prime ministers' meeting before the conference. In his opening remarks at that conference in April 1945 Smuts dealt with the accusation that the Commonwealth was "ganging up" against the other nations of the alliance and claimed that the prime ministers were only attempting to "come to some unity of outlook and action" which could only be "helpful to the Greater Conference to which we are all moving".⁵¹ He pointed out that the smaller Commonwealth countries would inevitably have to make concessions and that this would be "disappointing" to some, especially Canada. Most significantly, on the question of the great power veto and the principle of collective security he insisted that national parliaments have the ultimate say over whether to commit forces to the UN in an emergency.⁵²

Thus, to say that Smuts went to San Francisco as something of an "imperialist in disguise" is clearly an exaggeration. Moreover, if the record of subsequent Commonwealth disunity on major world issues is taken into account, the charge is even less valid. On the vote taken in the General Assembly concerning the partition of Palestine in 1947, for example, Britain abstained, South Africa and the "white" dominions voted in favour and the Asian dominions voted against partition.⁵³ Smuts telegraphed Attlee to say that much as he disliked disunity in Commonwealth action

⁵¹ TA, JCS, A., Vol.91 (Miscellaneous numbered papers 1940-1946), British Commonwealth Meeting (B.C.M. (45), 1st - 12th meetings, April 1945.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Round Table, Vol:38, 1947-1948, p.622.

"from a long range point of view it may prove to be an advantage for the Commonwealth not to be unanimous in this tangled situation and South Africa's de facto recognition [of Israel] now may prove advantageous".⁵⁴

⁵⁴ TA, JCS, A. British Government Papers, Vol.94 (Office of the High Commission for the United Kingdom in South Africa), No.660, Smuts - Attlee, 21 May 1948.

Chapter 3 : Decolonisation, Economic issues, Immigration and the Royal Tour

(a) Decolonisation

It has been noted that up until the Second World War the approach was for the United Kingdom alone to accept new members into the Commonwealth once dominion status had been achieved.¹ Thus Ireland was accepted into the Commonwealth by the terms of the Anglo-Irish treaty on 1921 without any reference being made to the other dominions. The war, however, had brought a shift in the power relations between Britain and the dominions. The British Labour government felt it necessary to consult them over policy regarding the Asian colonies in 1947-8, realising, perhaps, that developments in that part of the world were crucial for the Commonwealth in general.

Despite this, practical difficulties concerning consultation proved insurmountable during the fast-moving and delicate negotiations preceding Indian independence and inevitably some complained that they had been left out. Smuts was one statesman who had helped with advice for Attlee's government over India but who complained of inadequate consultation concerning the decision to grant independence.² He said that Britain should have paused before considering independence with the prospect of "civil war" and "chaos" ahead. In public he praised the decision but in private felt it had been an "awful mistake". When Ceylon's independence became imminent in 1947 he wrote, "Ceylon a Dominion this year? Am I mad or is the world mad?"³ Although he later came to accept Britain's retreat in Asia as being for the best,⁴ and

¹ H. Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth. A History of the British Commonwealth of Nations (London, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971), p.767.

² Ibid., p.786.

³ Hancock, Smuts: Fields of Force, p.447.

⁴ Ibid., p.449.

that the Commonwealth provided the best link between the Asian ex-colonies and Britain, it is clear that he never fully endorsed the concept of a multi-racial Commonwealth and that he preferred the closely-knit "White Man's Club" of pre-war years. After he left office he strenuously opposed the idea of granting India republican status within the Commonwealth, not only because he saw it as the inevitable dilution of the common loyalty to the crown but also because he thought that Malan would use the precedent as a "stepping stone to full secession in due course".⁵

(b) Economic issues

While Britain remained the chief source of South Africa's imports and the chief destination for her exports, as was the case for many years after World War 2, any argument over Commonwealth co-operation was largely futile. Furthermore, as the sterling area's gold producer, and as an important war-time supplier of primary products, South Africa was undisputedly and intricately involved in the Commonwealth economic and trading system.

Although in retrospect a long-term decline in the share of South Africa's post-war trade with Britain and the Commonwealth was to become evident, in the immediate post-war years there was an artificially high reliance on British and intra-Commonwealth trade for South Africa and for the Empire in general. Cut off from European markets and sources of supply during the war, Britain had to concentrate on her colonial, Commonwealth and United States sources. She thus made bulk-purchase arrangements for the supply of various raw materials and foodstuffs from the Empire, products that did not have to meet Japanese or European competition because of the wartime situation. As Miller points out, this was an artificial situation from a long-term point of view because before the war Europe accounted for more of Britain's exports than all of the dominions and the USA

⁵ Van der Poel, Selections, vol.7, pp. 296-297.

combined.⁶

The world-wide economic downturn immediately after the war meant that Britain and the sterling area maintained wartime controls on supplies and markets and foreign exchange. Trade in sterling was preferred to any other alternative and Britain restricted new overseas investments to the sterling area. This arrangement amounted to a "siege economy" for the Commonwealth and the colonies although Canada remained a "dollar" country because of its close relationship with the United States.⁷ For South Africa, the trade figures reveal a high degree of reliance on Commonwealth trade in the immediate post-war years. Some 69% of her exports went to Britain and other Commonwealth countries in the years 1945-48 and 48% of her imports were from the Commonwealth.⁸ The reliance on exports to the Commonwealth was particularly significant because the comparative pre-war figure (1935-39) was only 48%.⁹ This heavy trading bias in favour of Britain (in particular), while a function of the post-war economic crisis, was something that attracted criticism from the Nationalist opposition.

During the war the National Party, or HNP ("Herenigde Nasionale Party") as it was then known, had called for the termination of preferential economic links with the British Empire and had recommended that foreign trade be handled on a "quid pro quo" basis.¹⁰ This meant, in effect, that Britain would be treated as a foreign country in terms of economic status. The Nationalists

⁶ J.D.B. Miller, Survey, p.441.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland (South African Bureau of Census and Statistics), No. 25, 1949, pp.1052-1055.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ INCH, PV 93 (Verwoerd Collection), Vol.1 (Subject Files), File 1/12/92 (1943-1951), Economic Affairs: Report to the Chairman and Members of the Federal Council of the Reunited National Party, Cape Town, 1943, p.89.

called for the system of tariff preferences to be ended and for "special facilities" which had been given to Britain in the past, such as government contracts and British Standards, to be withdrawn. Africa was seen, instead, as the natural preference area for South Africa's products.

In 1945 Eric Louw wrote that South Africa had to be a "free and independent country in the fullest sense of the word" ("`n vrye en onafhanklike land in die volste sin moet wees") and went on to claim that Britain was trying to make the Empire into a "political as well as economic unity" by discouraging the dominions from trading with foreign countries.¹¹ South Africa, he wrote, was prepared to trade with all countries, including Britain, but solely on "business principles". In that same year, Smuts was criticised in parliament by a Nationalist spokesman on finance for being prepared to sign the Bretton Woods agreement which allowed Britain to maintain a preferential tariff for the Empire. The reason given was that

there was no justification for our tying ourselves to a nation in such a way that it will eventually land us in a war again.¹²

The Nationalists opposed the arrangements made by Smuts in 1947, during a severe balance of payments crisis for Britain, to help the British save dollar reserves by providing her with a special loan of gold from South Africa's reserves (amounting to £80 million). Die Transvaler said the loan "was not in the interests of South Africa First but Britain First".¹³ In parliament, the Nationalists stated that "No country, and England least of all, is entitled to expect charity from us."¹⁴ Even some of Smuts's

¹¹ Die Kruithoring, 28 November 1945.

¹² House of Assembly Debates, col.8881, 17 May 1945.

¹³ Die Transvaler, 11 October 1947.

¹⁴ House of Assembly Debates, col.522, 28 January 1948.

own supporters criticised the loan at a time when Britain was shutting certain South African products out of her colonial markets in response to the terms of the post-war American loan agreement.¹⁵

Britain had been forced during the war to make certain concessions in regard to opening up the imperial trading system to United States commercial interests. Article 7 of the Mutual Aid Agreement of February 1942 provided for the final settlement of Lend-Lease and the elimination of discriminatory tariffs and trade barriers.¹⁶ After the war a new loan agreement was drawn up which stipulated further restrictions on British sterling area trade. Article 9 of the 1946 Anglo-American loan agreement stated that if Britain were to impose any restrictions on imports from the USA she should impose the same restrictions on imports from all countries, including those in the sterling group.¹⁷

This meant, in effect, that South African exports to Britain and to British territories in Africa would be automatically restricted in line with dollar saving measures taken by Britain in relation to American imports. Hence, the restrictions that were imposed during the economic crisis of 1947 that affected South Africa's footwear exports (among other exports) and the consequent uproar in the South African parliament when the gold loan to Britain was being debated.

¹⁵ The United Party MP for Port Elizabeth North said on 29 January 1948 that he was "not prepared to swallow the story about the clause in the American Loan Agreement which shuts out our footwear from Great Britain" and that "as a member of the [Commonwealth] family we are entitled to family considerations" (House of Assembly Debates, col.535, 29 January 1948.)

¹⁶ Brindley Thomas, "The Evolution of the Sterling Area", in N. Mansergh and R. Wilson (eds), Commonwealth Perspectives (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958), pp. 185-186.

¹⁷ TA, A78 (Te Water), Vol.9, (1947-9: Economic Development in South Africa), File AE 3/1 (1948 August - 1949 August: General), I.M.F. Staff Memorandum No. 229, "The Economic Position of the Union of South Africa: 1947", pp. 13-16.

The gold loan agreement contained certain off-setting benefits in terms of British capital for gold production and in terms of continued access for South African farmers to the British market at guaranteed prices.¹⁸ In October 1947 Baring wrote to Sir Eric Machtig, the permanent secretary at the dominions office, to say that he had conversed with the governor of the South African Reserve Bank who had just returned from London, where the gold loan agreement had been signed. Baring told him the main aim had been to secure an agreement which would be honoured by a Nationalist government in future, so the main idea was to provide Britain with an inducement to assist gold production in South Africa.¹⁹ The Nationalists, he said, would have opposed both a loan of gold and any undertaking to sell a set quantity to the British, so the agreement incorporated a "rather subtle scheme" for encouraging gold production while securing for a single customer (Britain) most of the gold that would be produced.

The Nationalists tried to force through an amendment in parliament that would have made the gold loan dependent on revised terms which would have secured, as Dr Stals put it, "the proper protection of South Africa's interests".²⁰ But they were defeated by 79 votes to 28.²¹ This victory for Smuts's government was ascribed, by one daily newspaper, to J.H. Hofmeyr's assurances that every effort was being made to solve the problem of Britain's embargo on South African goods in her African colonies.²² It was also a result of many Nationalists realising that the loan held certain off-setting benefits for farmers in the citrus and wine-producing areas and that these benefits would be endangered if the loan did not go ahead.

¹⁸ The Star, 10 October 1947.

¹⁹ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.150.

²⁰ House of Assembly Debates, col.522, 28 January 1948.

²¹ Rand Daily Mail, 3 February 1948.

²² Ibid.

The successful conclusion of the gold loan debate did not, however, end the problem of the embargo of South African goods in British African colonies. A month before the general elections of 1948 in which the United Party lost power to the National Party, the external affairs department was reporting little progress in talks with a visiting British official on the matter and felt it necessary to issue a veiled threat to retaliate with import restrictions against British and American goods unless "satisfactory arrangements" were concluded.²³

The gold loan debate reflected, like so many other issues of the time, a "whites only" approach to political problems in South Africa. Black opinion on this issue was neither consulted nor quoted. It was only indirectly referred to by one of the natives' representatives, Donald Molteno, in parliament. The latter mentioned, during the second reading debate, the effect on the "masses of the people of this country" if there were a financial collapse in South Africa as a result of the crisis in the British economy being allowed to continue through lack of help from South Africa and elsewhere.²⁴ The Bantu World commented on the British economic crisis in August 1947 when the effects were at their worst. It accused "many shortsighted people" of rejoicing in Britain's problems and of not realising "how much the British taxpayer was contributing to colonial development in Africa".²⁵

(c) Immigration

During Smuts's post-war premiership immigration policy became a hotly debated issue and one which contributed to his election defeat in 1948 at the hands of the Nationalists. Since immigration was by statutory definition only a "European" phenomenon, the argument between Smuts and the opposition

²³ TA, A 78 (Te Water), Vol.4, File AE 2/1/1, External Affairs Policy Review, No.8, April 1948.

²⁴ House of Assembly Debates, cols.537-539, 28 January 1948.

²⁵ Bantu World, 9 August 1947.

centred on the question of which European element in the population should predominate.²⁶ The Nationalists accused Smuts of trying to "plough the Afrikaner under" by inviting thousands of immigrants from Europe into South Africa after the war. They promised to stem the flow once they came to power and to balance the flow with the country's "absorption capacity". They also hinted at a policy which would reduce the proportion of immigrants from Britain and increase the proportion from Holland, Germany and Northern Europe - areas which were regarded as having more of an affinity with the Afrikaners.²⁷

Immigration policy was therefore very pertinent to the future of the Commonwealth connection which could be strengthened or weakened by altering the composition of the white population. Both main political parties were aware of this. In 1946 Heaton Nicholls had expressed concern that "political pressure" in the Union had forced Smuts to introduce "unnecessary" interviewing procedures in London for prospective immigrants.²⁸ He felt that a change in government would herald a period of systematic policy discrimination against the British element in the immigration laws and that an attempt would be made to change the composition of the white population even more to the Nationalists' advantage. The Nationalists, on the other hand, constantly criticised Smuts's immigration policy in parliament and accused him of placing Britain before South Africa and of not being "selective enough".²⁹

²⁶ F.G. Brownell, "British Immigration to South Africa, 1946-1970", Archives Year Book for South African History, Vol.48, No.1, 1985, pp.8, 16-17. (The Immigration Act of 1913 and subsequent legislation effectively excluded non-Europeans from the definition of legal immigrants by providing for the discretionary exclusion by the Minister of any persons or class of persons deemed on social or economic grounds to be "unsuited").

²⁷ Ibid., pp.29-32.

²⁸ Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in My Time, p.407.

²⁹ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.29.

In 1946 at Smuts's request, a confidential cabinet memorandum was drawn up which had as its main aim the finding of ways to "increase the European population through immigration" and the meeting of demand for manpower in mines and industry.³⁰ The memorandum noted the severe shortage of skilled manpower in South Africa and that the country could not meet the shortage from its own labour resources. Thus it recommended that "every effort should be made to attract to South Africa promising immigrants from Europe and other countries". A screening process for intending immigrants would be applied and an "advisory" committee for those from the United Kingdom was suggested.

The government went ahead in following years with this plan and established an Immigrants Selection Committee in European embassies while at the same time initiating interviewing procedures at South Africa House in London. Heaton Nicholls had described the latter as unnecessary because, as Smuts explained to his deputy, Hofmeyr, British migrants were not required by law to fulfil any conditions before emigrating to South Africa.³¹ Heaton Nicholls may also have resented the fact that the new committee operated independently of South Africa House.³² Nevertheless Smuts mentioned that he had given the go-ahead for Heaton Nicholls to negotiate with the shipping ministry in Britain to release ships from the Union Castle Line to "bring roughly 20,000 intending settlers, all approved by the 1820 Settlers Association" to the Union.

It would of course be a great fillip to our policy if this could be done Only overall general supervision in South Africa is called for in their case. They are otherwise no liability to our

³⁰ TA, JCS, Vol.165, No.37, Memorandum for the Prime Minister on Immigration, 10 August 1946.

³¹ TA, JCS, Vol.165, No.137, Smuts - Hofmeyr, 18 September 1946.

³² Brownell, "British Immigration", p.24.

government.³³

The Nationalists immediately attacked Smuts in parliament for giving preferential encouragement to British migrants, accusations which were strenuously denied although the immigration figures revealed an overwhelming preponderance of British and Commonwealth migrants in the years 1947-1948.³⁴ Eric Louw took up the cudgels in the 1947 session against what he called the "large scale, State-sponsored immigration" scheme initiated by Smuts and promised that "when we are in power..we shall see that an end is made to it".³⁵ He claimed that the immigrant selection committees were not doing their job and that "as far as English people are concerned, advice is merely given to immigrants, there is no control".³⁶ When asked if he was adverse to British immigrants, Louw replied, "I am not opposed to them provided they are decent people and not just England's misfits. These are the people we are getting."

These remarks were reported by The Star which claimed that Louw's "resentment" and that of the Nationalists in general

derives almost wholly from a race antipathy towards newcomers of British stock, and it has roots in a secret fear that the entry of the newcomer may sound the death-knell of that medieval concept of political separatism which the Party still hogs to itself.³⁷

³³ TA, JCS, Vol.165, No.137, Smuts - Hofmeyr, 18 September 1946.

³⁴ Statistical Year Book 1964, Central Statistical Services (Pretoria, Department of Statistics). "Migration statistics 1924-63". The figures showed that out of a total of 50,458 migrants received in the period 1940-47, British migrants accounted for 70,2% of the total.

³⁵ House of Assembly Debates, cols. 3512-3513, 29 April 1947.

³⁶ Ibid., col.3519, 29 April 1947.

³⁷ The Star, 2 May 1947.

As Brownell points out, much of the opposition of the Nationalists to Smuts's policy stemmed from the fear that British migrants would end up voting for Smuts.³⁸ As early as 1944, as Eric Louw had pointed out, NP policy had been to make the Aliens Act of 1937 apply to British immigrants as well as others and had opposed any "Imperial" or Union assisted immigration schemes.³⁹

The Dominion Party, on the other hand (more vociferous in its defence of the British connection than Smuts and the UP), criticised the government in the same debate for not doing enough to aid British immigration and for not shutting the last loophole to Indian immigration into the Union.⁴⁰ Mainly representing Natal English voters the Dominion Party feared that Natal would be swamped by Indian immigrants if the clause of the Cape Town Agreement allowing wives and children of already established immigrants were not closed. It was this sort of attitude that had enraged the Indian government and which had demonstrated the difficulties facing Smuts in his relations with other Commonwealth countries which wanted normal relations with the newly independent India.

It was left to Margaret Ballinger, natives' representative for Eastern Cape, to express the views of the "two thirds majority of the population who had a "very special and direct interest" in the government's immigration policies.⁴¹ Criticising the stated aim of Smuts's policy to increase the European population, she expressed the "deepest resentment" of the African population who saw it as the government's assumption that there could never be "peaceful, happy co-operation between the African population and the European population". The policy merely deflected attention from the "most urgent task of adjusting the

³⁸ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.29.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ House of Assembly Debates, col.2634, 10 April 1947.

⁴¹ Ibid., cols.311-314, 3 March 1947.

relationship between Europeans and Africans" by a growing confidence and co-operation instead of "driving us further apart".

(d) The Royal Tour 1947.

Douglas-Home notes that Smuts had been pressing for a visit by the royal family to South Africa long before the war ended and that he had proposed 1946 as a date.⁴² The king had refused then on the grounds that it was too early and there was too much for him to do in Britain after the war, so the two governments agreed on 1947. The tour was thus not conceived as a special trip to save South Africa for the Empire, as some had alleged.⁴³ All the dominions were to be visited after the war to thank them for their contribution to allied forces. Baring, however, hoped that the tour would yield some diplomatic benefit for British/South African relations that were still then "much coloured" by the Boer War and the divisions caused at the outbreak of World War II.⁴⁴

The visit of the British royal family to South Africa in 1947 brought out all the different latent feelings in the South African population concerning the monarchy as a symbol of the British connection. White society was split, largely on language lines, between those who rejoiced in the affirmation of the monarchy as a symbol of English-speaking South African links with Britain and the Empire and those (Afrikaner Nationalists) who rejected the monarchy as the symbol of defeat and denial of republican independence since the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The dispute over South African participation on Britain's side during the Second World War had sharpened these feelings on both sides and so political tensions between government and opposition were inevitably bound to be expressed in the context of the royal

⁴² Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.151.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

visit.

Indian and African opinions concerning the tour were also divided. On the one hand were those "moderate loyalists" who supported the royal visit and who expressed their hopes and affections for the monarchy as a symbol of a fast-disappearing non-racial tradition dating from Victorian rule in the old Cape Colony. Then there were those who were represented by the mainstream African and Indian political movements who felt the tour should be boycotted as a sign of protest against Smuts's racial policies and what was seen as British complicity in those policies. The crown, they argued, was the ultimate constitutional authority in South Africa, and had to take responsibility for South Africa's discriminatory political system, despite the niceties of convention and protocol.

Aside from those with political views about the tour were the hundreds of thousands on both sides of the racial divide who turned up out of sheer curiosity to see the royal party as it progressed through the Union and the protectorates. Many simply defied or were ignorant of the various boycott calls by organisations purporting to represent them. Some prominent Afrikaner republicans declared themselves to be "charmed" by the royal family⁴⁵ and some prominent officials of the ANC and SAIC had to be repudiated by their respective organisations for attending welcoming functions. A.W. Champion, the Natal leader of the ANC, had to be reprimanded for appearing at the official Durban welcome for the royals.⁴⁶

Baring reported to Addison in February that one of the SAIC delegates to the UN had remarked in New York that he supported

⁴⁵ "The Crown Itinerant: Notes on the Royal Tour of South Africa", Round Table, Vol.37, 1946-1947, pp.205-211.

⁴⁶ University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library (Historical Papers), Champion Papers (A 922), File Da 48 (ANC Official Correspondence), C. Mbonambe -S.P. Hlatshwayo, 29 March 1947.

the tour and was promptly repudiated by Dr G.M. Naicker and Dr Y. Dadoo, two executive colleagues.⁴⁷

In considering the official response of the ANC and SAIC to the tour, two important factors influencing their attitudes become apparent; firstly, the discriminatory arrangements made by the Smuts government for blacks before and during the tour (complaints about which were voiced even by the loyalist Bantu World)⁴⁸ and secondly, the broader political factors relating to the repressive situation in the country and, thus, the inappropriate timing of the tour.

In relation to the first, Baring, the high commissioner, also noted how the arrangements for the tour effectively excluded the black population who seemed always to be behind a wall of white policemen.⁴⁹ The Union officials refused to allow the king to shake hands with blacks or to pin medals on them himself during investiture ceremonies and Baring had to intervene when they tried to extend the same prohibition to his visit to the territories. He said that if the king was not going to shake hands with the Africans he was not going to shake hands with the Europeans either, whereupon the king proceeded to shake hands and pin medals on everyone, an action which was favourably received by the local press in the territories.

According to Baring, the royal party noted a contrast between the freedom and openness with which they had been exposed to the Africans in the high commission territories and the "slightly peremptory way" in which they had been exposed to Union

⁴⁷ PRO, DO 119 (Dominions Office: High Commissioner for South Africa, Original Correspondence), File 1429 (Visit of the Royal Family to South Africa 1946-47), Telegram from High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 12 February 1947.

⁴⁸ Bantu World, 26 April 1947.

⁴⁹ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.153.

Africans.⁵⁰

In relation to the second, more broadly political reason for African and Indian opposition to the tour, the secretary of the Natal Indian Congress referred to the fact that although the Indian community had the "greatest respect" for the royal family, at that time Indians were passing through one of the "most critical moments in their history" and that it was therefore "unreasonable to expect Indians to participate in any rejoicing".⁵¹

The ANC's position was given at the annual conference in December 1946 in a resolution which stated that:

As a protest against the barbarous policy of the Union government of denying the elementary democratic rights to Africans and in view of the fact these injustices are perpetuated and maintained in the name of His Majesty King George VI of the Union of South Africa, this Conference instructs the incoming Executive Committee to devise ways and means likely to bring about the abstention of the Africans from ...the welcoming of the Royal Family during its tour of the Union.⁵²

Nevertheless, as was evidenced by the Champion case, it proved difficult to prevent many in the organisation and those who were uncommitted to stay away.

"Loyalist" African opinion had its voice in the Bantu World. Its editor, Selope Thema, was strongly opposed to the ANC's boycott

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ TA, JCS, Vol.166, No.41, S.A. Police Memorandum: Indian, Native and Communist Boycott in Connection with the Royal Visit, 7 February 1947.

⁵² Karis, Hope and Challenge, p.266.

policy and from the beginning took up a position of belligerent loyalty to the monarchy. Historical links between the reigns of Queen Victoria "the Good" and George VI were explained. The British monarchy was described as the "best example of just treatment of and better relations between old civilisations and new" and the Commonwealth ideal was praised as an evolution from "crude Empire" to "a nobler conception of diverse peoples linked together in a single Commonwealth and dwelling in freedom and peace".⁵³ In its farewell statement to the royal family Bantu World claimed that the ANC and SAIC boycott calls had been ignored because of the realisation that the royals "weren't responsible" for the oppressive conditions under which Africans and Indians laboured.⁵⁴ Then, in May, it reported approvingly that the ANC's national anthem, "Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika" had been played "at the King's request", on board H.M.S. Vanguard by a band of the Royal Marines.⁵⁵

In contrast to these sentiments was the cautiously non-committal stance of Malan's Nationalists. In March 1946, when Smuts first announced in parliament the visit of the royals to South Africa, Malan set out his party's official attitude. He criticised Smuts for seeking "political advantage" out of the tour and said that Afrikaners would accord the royals a "polite welcome" but would boycott all official celebrations (unless "constitutional considerations" required the presence of the official opposition).⁵⁶ But Nationalists then boycotted the "Loyal Address" to the king by both houses of parliament on 17 February 1947.

Baring noted that it was the King's "essential ordinariness" that carried him through the "protocolaire nightmares" which hovered

⁵³ Bantu World, 15 February 1947.

⁵⁴ Bantu World, 26 April 1947.

⁵⁵ Bantu World, 3 May 1947.

⁵⁶ House of Assembly Debates, col.3990, 21 March 1946.

about the early ceremonies.⁵⁷ Malan, next to whom Baring's wife sat during the main banquet, refused to sing "God Save the King" after "Die Stem" and at the end of the banquet it was not played at all. Col. Stallard leapt up and started singing it on his own at which point everyone else "including the orchestra" started singing it.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, it was noted by Baring that further "embarrassing incidents" were few during the tour and that the only Nationalist politician to stay away from all the official functions concerning the visit was J.G. Strijdom.⁵⁹ In his general impressions of the tour, written in a despatch of 10 March, Baring noted the attitudes of the "two wings" of the National Party.⁶⁰ The one under Strijdom's leadership he saw as being "unrelenting" in its hatred of the British connection. The other, under Malan, he saw as being "moderate" and was reflected by newspapers such as Die Burger. Die Transvaler, on the other hand, reflected the extremist view. (Under its editor, H.F. Verwoerd, it had proposed a complete boycott of the royal tour, to the extent that it refused to report on the tour's progress. Even Strijdom had disagreed with this editorial policy).

Baring had noted further that there were "divisions" in the response of non-European organisations to the tour but claimed it was too early to judge its effects on the organisations boycotting the tour.⁶¹ Towards the end of the tour, in response to a question from the queen about the results of the visit, Baring said he felt it would not change any votes but might make

⁵⁷ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.152.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ PRO, DO 119, File 1429, M/70/105, Baring - Addison, 19 February 1947.

⁶⁰ DO 119, File 1429, M/70/112, Baring - Addison, 10 March 1947.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the Nationalists more disposed to be friendly to the English.⁶²

As to whether, in conclusion, one could agree with Smuts who said that the royal tour had had "a soothing, healing effect" on South Africans, or whether it ended up dividing them even more is difficult to judge. However much the king might have been seen as a symbolically unifying figure for many South Africans, it is clear also that each community placed in the king its own separate hopes or fears. For many Africans and Indians the king represented the last link with that fast-disappearing world of Victorian liberalism and the forlorn hope that it could still be resurrected. For many English speakers, the strength of their loyalty was in direct proportion to the growth of Afrikaner nationalism and reflected the fear that links with the Commonwealth and Empire were under threat.

For most Afrikaners, however, the tour revived the resentments and bitter memories of less compromising and more hostile periods in Anglo-Afrikaner relations. Afrikaner Nationalists accused Smuts of using the tour to bolster his faltering political support. The severe defeat suffered by the UP at the Hottentots-Holland by-election just before the royals arrived may have boosted that perception, although, in fact, the dates of the tour had been arranged many months previously.

In terms of South Africa's relations with Britain and the Commonwealth the overall assessment of the royal tour could be that the temporary euphoria and excitement it created may have masked the reality of a relationship that was slowly drifting apart.⁶³ As had become clear by 1948, it was the racial question that had come to predominate in South Africa's relations with the outside world. Although appeals to ethnic and racial sentiment had dominated the parliamentary debates during the Smuts era, ultimately it was the issue of race relations that caused Smuts's

⁶² Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.157.

⁶³ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.25.

political fortunes to founder in 1948. Smuts's view of black political development had been encapsulated in his statement to Lord Athlone, the governor-general, some 25 years previously: "I never turn my attention to native affairs until I have to."⁶⁴ By 1948, of course, it was already too late.

⁶⁴ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.146.

PART 2: THE MALAN YEARS, 1948-1954

Introduction.

The accession to power of the National Party/Afrikaner Party alliance in May 1948 marked the beginning of a new period in South Africa's Commonwealth relations. Committed to a policy of eventual republican independence and ideologically hostile to the symbolism of British imperial hegemony in South Africa, D.F. Malan's government embarked, somewhat cautiously at first, upon a course which would lead inexorably towards secession. Although never consciously intended by Malan himself, the precedent created by Ireland's republican independence outside the Commonwealth in 1948, rather than by India's republican independence within the Commonwealth in 1949, was the eventual path followed by South Africa during H.F. Verwoerd's premiership in 1961.

Malan's government was by no means secure at first in its victory over Smuts's United Party in 1948 and was thus restrained in its public attitude to republicanism and the Commonwealth connection. With a majority of only 5 seats over the combined opposition and heavily dependent upon N.C. Havenga's moderate (in terms of republicanism) Afrikaner Party to achieve a parliamentary majority, Malan had to reassure English voters that there would be no attempt in the current parliament to introduce republican independence and certainly not by means of a bare parliamentary majority. White voters would be tested in a referendum and the question of the Commonwealth relationship would be treated separately, the latter proviso being eventually accepted, albeit reluctantly, by the anti-Commonwealth faction in Malan's cabinet under the leadership of J.G. Strijdom.

As we shall see in this section, there were other constraints upon Malan's republicanism that were not wholly related to domestic political opinion. South Africa's financial position after 1948 was not conducive to policies that aimed at a radical break with the past, as the Te Water mission soon indicated. Charles te Water, former South African high commissioner and head

of the South African delegation to the League of Nations, was appointed by Malan to act as South Africa's roving ambassador in 1948 and 1949 to calm fears overseas about the new government's policies and to try and negotiate a loan to overcome the balance of payments difficulties of those years.

Global politics also played a part in helping Malan's government to rethink its attitude to Commonwealth co-operation. The deteriorating relations between East and West exemplified by the Berlin Crisis and the outbreak of the Korean War made many Nationalists wary of being isolated in an increasingly dangerous world. As we shall see, relations with Britain and, thus, the Commonwealth, assumed new importance in the strategic sense and Malan's government soon proved even more amenable (in British eyes) to the idea of defence commitments than Smuts's government had ever been after 1945.

It will be argued in this section that the British attitude to the new Nationalist government, defined as it was by economic and strategic constraints on British policy makers under the first post-war Labour government, gave mixed signals to the South Africans. On the one hand, the placatory attitude of the British on issues such as the Seretse affair (examined in chapter 5), decolonisation (chapter 6) and defence issues (chapter 9) encouraged the Nationalists to believe the British would remain a stalwart ally of South Africa in the Commonwealth and UNO. It also helped to modify their hostility to the Commonwealth and eventual secession (although internal political factors were, perhaps, of greater importance concerning the delays over the republican campaign). On the other hand, British moves towards self-government for colonies in West Africa aroused considerable alarm and protest from Malan's government that contributed to the increasing formalisation of relations between the two governments noticed already in the Smuts period.

A further "toenadering" of the English and Afrikaans sectors of the white population on foreign and domestic issues is a further

theme of this section. It was helped by the fact that Malan's moves towards republicanism were piecemeal during his period of office and were largely confined to symbolic acts of assertion of South Africa's right to complete independence within the developing framework of the Commonwealth's constitutional processes (the London Declaration of 1949 being the defining point of reference in this regard). Legislative measures passed by South Africa's parliament such as the Citizenship Act of 1949 could thus be defended by the Nationalists as merely bringing South Africa into line with the latest developments elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

This did not, however, prevent a storm of protest breaking out among those who valued the British connection in South Africa and who saw such measures as being the first steps towards secession. Those who questioned the Nationalists' commitment to not just the letter but also the spirit of the Commonwealth relationship were able as well to point to other less formal measures taken by Malan's government such as the seemingly deliberate exclusion of English-speakers from high positions in the civil service and military.

The formation of the Torch Commando in opposition to what was perceived as a deliberate attempt by the Nationalists to undermine the constitution marked a high-point in uniting disparate but mainly white English-speaking groups against the government in the years 1952-1953. However, the energies of this opposition front were soon dissipated in squabbles over what had always marked the fault line in white politics in South Africa: the role of non-whites in any alternate system of government. The coup de grace was administered by the official opposition party itself, the United Party, which turned its back on any form of extra-parliamentary protest in 1953 and which moved even closer to the Nationalist position on race relations in general.

As we shall see, the question of South Africa's relations with Britain and the Commonwealth seemed to most commentators at the

time to be a whites-only affair and this perception was bolstered by the lack of attention paid in parliament and in the overwhelmingly white-owned media to black views on this subject and on other political topics in general. At a time of increasing radicalisation of black politics under the pressure of the apartheid programme adopted by the Nationalists, both main white population groups moved closer together to counter what was perceived to be a threat to their existence on the continent of Africa and at home. Debates in parliament on the need for a common front with the colonial powers against Communism and stirring African nationalism showed that the opposition and Nationalists had much the same concerns in foreign policy and it was rare to hear the voice of a Margaret Ballinger or a Sam Kahn expressing the need for co-operation with the excluded majority.

The perceived threat to white security and living standards in the cities posed by black urbanisation after the war was an important factor in driving the two largest white political parties towards consensus on internal and external issues. Authors such as Deborah Posel¹ have shown how concerned the new Nationalist government was to contain the size of the African presence in the cities in the 1950s and 1960s and how the state's capacity to realize its aims during the 1950s was hindered by "an unwitting internal contradiction in the formulation of apartheid policy, which widened the space for resistance on several fronts".² This contradiction lay in the policy of "urban labour preference" which proved largely unsuccessful and had the unintended result of increasing the African migrant labour population throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the immediate post-war period the anxieties of whites about being "swamped" by Africans in the cities were "heightened by rising levels of

¹ Deborah Posel, The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961. Conflict and Compromise (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991) and "Curbing African Urbanization in the 1950s and 1960s" in M. Swilling, R. Humphries and K. Shubane (eds), Apartheid in Transition (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.19-32.

² Posel, "Curbing African Urbanization", pp.19-20.

political turbulence and often militant protest in urban African communities, provoked largely by appalling living conditions".³ The Nationalists were only partly successful in curbing black urbanisation and political turbulence in the black community during the years 1949 to 1961 and this indicated how opportunities for independent black political action still existed despite massive police and military intervention. Often, black resistance (or protests from the mainly English-speaking business community) caused the government to modify its influx control plans in the early 1950s (as the debates and subsequent amendments to Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act indicated).⁴ The hesitancies and "mistakes" made in the 1950s were to cause a significant change in the direction of Nationalist urbanization policy in the 1960s which led to a more thorough-going (and, inevitably, more brutal) programme of population removals and controls.

The negative effect on black opinion about the British (and, initially, the Commonwealth) connection caused by what was perceived as British vacillations in policy towards the Nationalists, will be noted in this section. The leaders of the main African and Indian nationalist parties such as the ANC and SAIC professed, at first, to see no difference between the governments of Malan and Smuts as far as blacks were concerned although it was acknowledged that apartheid posed a greater threat to black aspirations than anything previously experienced. As the black opposition mobilised itself for confrontation with the government on a scale never seen before, the adoption by its spokesmen of the anti-colonial rhetoric of contemporary African and Asian nationalist movements became increasingly apparent. The internal changes within the main extra-parliamentary political movement, the ANC, were mirrored in the shift towards a more assertive anti-colonial stance on foreign affairs which, inevitably, resulted in a deteriorating attitude to the main

³ Ibid., p.20.

⁴ Posel, The Making of Apartheid, pp.95-99.

colonial power, Britain (and her "white" Commonwealth partners). The increased influence of the Youth League and the Communist Party within the Congress Alliance after the ousting of the "liberal" A.B. Xuma in 1949 had resulted in a more militant programme of action against white hegemony and the adoption of a more socialistic ideological orientation.⁵

British moves to appease white South African opinion over the protectorates and to protect South Africa at the United Nations continued to be noted. On the other hand, British moves towards decolonisation in Africa and Asia were welcomed by black opinion in general and the concept of Commonwealth as opposed to Empire (greatly strengthened by the accession to Commonwealth status of the three Asian dominions of India, Pakistan and Ceylon), was favourably received because, as one black newspaper put it, the Empire had "metamorphasized" into a new "flowering" - the Commonwealth, which meant Britain had seen the wisdom of "bowing to and anticipating the inevitable [decolonisation]".⁶ Similarly, British royalty seemed still to hold the affections of many as was evidenced by the reaction in the African and Indian press to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

In the economic field, as we shall see, the crises of 1948 and 1949 (and other global economic factors) helped the Nationalists to modify or postpone plans for a downgrading of links with the sterling area and with the Commonwealth preference system in general. Although the radical break with the imperial trading system proposed in 1943 and by anti-British spokesmen such as Eric Louw had already been watered down by the time of the 1948 election, the ultimate aim of complete independence in the economic field was not entirely shelved. It was encouraged by the world-wide move towards a multi-lateral trading system after the

⁵ See Tom Lodge's discussion of effects of these changes on ANC policies (culminating in the adoption of the Freedom Charter of 1955) in his book, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, pp.28-73.

⁶ Ilanga Lase Natal, 25 April 1953.

Second World War which gathered strength in the 1950's as the sterling area started to recover from its initial crises and as the United States economy expanded. The Nationalist government, however, continued to commit South Africa to full co-operation with the sterling Commonwealth, a policy which, with few exceptions, was seen to be in the country's interests.

Chapter 4: The 1948 Election: Implications(a) Initial response

In its commentary upon the campaign and results of the 1948 elections, the leading journal of Commonwealth opinion, Round Table, noted that no mention had been made in the pre-election manifesto of the National Party about relations with the Commonwealth.¹ It also noted the absence of any real "harsh, anti-English propaganda" and that concessions had been given on the issue of an immediate republic in that it had been promised that a republic would not be introduced by means of a bare parliamentary majority.

However, the fact that not one English speaker could be found in the new cabinet was also commented upon and that the parliament was "divided more solidly than ever before" between English and Afrikaner. All the Afrikaans constituencies of the United Party, it noted, had crossed to the Nationalists. "Nationalism was now firmly in the saddle" and the "mere passage of time" combined with the effects of the Nationalists' "anti-colour" campaign had resulted in Smuts's defeat.²

Malan, it was noted, had acknowledged in his victory broadcast of 4 June that "the uniquely friendly relations existing between South Africa and the United Kingdom and other members of the British Commonwealth of Nations ...should be continued".³ However, he had also referred to India's recent accession to Commonwealth membership with less than wholehearted enthusiasm, saying that it meant "more emphasis, perhaps, on separate contacts between individual members of the Commonwealth", rather

¹ "South Africa: Nationalism in the Saddle", Round Table, vol.38, 1947-8, pp.814-817.

² Ibid., p.815.

³ Ibid.

than on discussions "at joint and inclusive conferences".⁴

It was unclear, continued the writer, whether Malan would himself attend the next Commonwealth prime ministers' meeting. Furthermore, the release of Robey Leibbrandt, the "notorious Nazi spy", had aroused the anger of ex-servicemen's associations and following closely was the decision to allow civil servants to join the Ossewa Brandwag and the Broederbond. All these measures taken together, said the writer, had increased the "lack of confidence" in the new South African government overseas.

The above-mentioned views of Round Table on the results of the 1948 elections were a fairly accurate summary of the reception given to the Nationalist victory in Britain and among opposition circles in South Africa. Anxiety at what the future held for English South Africans was combined with a certain amount of relief that Malan intended to maintain the Commonwealth connection and to postpone republicanism for the duration of the coming parliament.

Geyser claims that there was "no alarm" among British business interests at the election results, nor about investments in South Africa,⁵ but it has been pointed out that there was a "short-term adverse international economic reaction with reserves dropping by £37m and the withdrawal of some industrial investments".⁶ That the new government must have been aware of the uncertainty overseas was shown by the alacrity with which it moved to reassure investors, sending Charles Te Water to Britain and the USA in August to smooth over ruffled feathers. In a press interview before he left, Te Water was asked whether he thought he could persuade people overseas that "democracy in South Africa had not disappeared" since the

⁴ Ibid., p.816.

⁵ O. Geyser, Watershed for South Africa, London 1961 (Pretoria, Butterworths, 1983), p.23.

⁶ Barratt and Barber, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.29. and n.1, p.358.

Nationalist victory.⁷ He replied that he believed he would find it easy to convince people that "the present government, like its predecessors, had the interests of the country at heart and that its policy was democratic". By October, however, he was complaining of bad press coverage overseas and of "disturbing evidence of concerted attempt emanating from Union to damage Union's credit overseas".⁸

In November The Star in Johannesburg said in an editorial that Te Water would have found his task easier "if Nationalists like Strijdom had left him free to say that South Africa would continue to govern itself along the lines of the British Parliamentary system", and that it was "useless" of him to assure the Americans of South Africa's continued desire to strengthen the Commonwealth "while Strijdom was proclaiming his party's republican objective".⁹

The response of black and Indian political organisations to the results of the 1948 election in South Africa was, not surprisingly, pessimistic. Some claimed that it would not make much difference whether Smuts was replaced by Malan or not since they were both seen as racialists intent on suppressing black rights. For example, Dr A.B. Xuma stated at a press conference in April 1948 before the elections that there was no democracy in South Africa, "just a white oligarchy" and that the National Party's proposed apartheid policy was just an "elaboration of Union Native Policy" with "improvements" to include Indians and coloureds.¹⁰

After the Nationalist victory at the polls the president of the Cape regional branch of the ANC, the Reverend J.A. Calata, stated in his presidential address to the regional congress of the party that

⁷ Die Burger, 20 August 1948.

⁸ TA, A 78 (Te Water), Vol.9, File AE3/1 (Economic Development in South Africa - General, 1948 Jan.- 1949 Aug.), Te Water- Forsyth, 29 October 1948.

⁹ The Star, 19 November 1948.

¹⁰ Karis, Hope and Challenge, p.274.

apartheid was just "old policies in new form" and that there was little difference in fact between the two main white parties.¹¹ He did, however, acknowledge that the change of government was received "with a certain amount of excitement and anxiety" by Africans. South Africa, he said, was a "funny country" in that its rulers were "full of fear". They feared the black people "who outnumber them three to one", and although it was supposed to be part of the British Commonwealth of Nations "yet it can have an anti-British government".¹²

It soon became apparent, however, that a far greater threat to black aspirations was being posed by the Nationalists' apartheid policies than by the indefinite "trusteeship" policy of the Smuts era. Eddie Roux, a member of the banned Communist Party in the 1950's, noted that "the coming to power of the Nationalist Government in 1948 was the most significant event in South African history in recent times",¹³ and that "there began for South Africa a period of racial legislation more thoroughgoing, more grotesque perhaps, than anything the country had yet seen".

Reflecting the changes within the leadership of the ANC (towards a strengthening of the Youth League and Communist Party members in the executive)¹⁴ and in response to the new policy of apartheid, the ANC adopted its most militant programme of defiance yet at the 1949 annual conference and joined with other organisations to appoint a Joint Planning Council to co-ordinate the mass campaign of defiance of apartheid laws. Thus was set the stage for the greatest challenge since Union to South Africa's white power structures, the "Defiance Campaign" of the early 1950's, which was eventually crushed by a combination of repressive police action and organisational problems within the protesting alliance itself. In turn, the campaign

¹¹ Ibid., p.280.

¹² Ibid., pp.280-281.

¹³ Eddie Roux, Time Longer than Rope (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p.366.

¹⁴ Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, pp.27-28.

reinforced the trend towards a consensus on racial matters among the main white political parties and on the perceived threat posed by African nationalism to South Africa externally and internally.

In the resolutions of the ANC and other extra-parliamentary organisations, on the other hand, a markedly more hostile attitude to British colonialism and towards "imperialism" in general, began to appear. A policy manifesto of the ANC Youth League in 1948 stated that Europeans had "carved up and divided Africans among themselves" and had "dispossessed, by force of arms, the owners of the land - the children of the soil". It noted that "A few Europeans love justice and condemn racial oppression, but their voice is negligible and in the last analysis counts for nothing."¹⁵

By the time of the 1954 annual congress of the ANC the "decline of liberalism" in South Africa was being lamented in the address by the president-general, Chief Albert Luthuli, who claimed that it was a "sad commentary on the attitude of white South Africa that in the Union of South Africa liberalism should be held to such extreme and malicious scorn that any white person showing any leanings towards such liberalism is regarded as a renegade and so shunned if not completely ostracised".¹⁶ He warned the Congress against being blind to the fact that the "baaskap spirit of the Boer Republics" was "in the ascendancy in the Union", which, he said, accounted for the fact that "every day" the United Party was becoming "indistinguishable" from the National Party.

After all both the United Party and the Nationalist Party vie for the position of being guardians of the traditional Native Policy of South Africa and the essence of this policy is the baaskap spirit of the Boer Republics where

¹⁵ Karis, Hope and Challenge, p.328.

¹⁶ William Cullen Library (WCL), University of the Witwatersrand, AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box a (National Congress Meetings), 3. Annual Report of the National Executive Committee to the 42nd Annual Conference of the ANC, Durban, 16-19 December 1954. Address by Chief A.J. Luthuli, President-General, pp.3-4.

each white farmer was a supreme lord over his African peasants.¹⁷

At that 1954 conference the ANC outlined the cardinal points of its foreign policy which were described as "an uncompromising stand for world peace and opposition to colonialism and white domination".¹⁸ It noted that "the struggle to free South Africa and indeed all of Africa" was a "serious problem" that would mean a "struggle against six major imperial nations and their satellites such as Malan, Roy Welensky, Blundell and others". The ANC should ask itself, continued the report, certain questions concerning "any prospective ally": was that country or group in the "imperialist camp or in the anti-imperialist camp", was it for "equality or for racial discrimination", was it "pro-African or anti-African freedom" and lastly, was it for or anti "Colonialism"? The ANC would base its attitude to any country on "the answer to all these questions". It recorded its thanks to the UNO Commission on Racial Discrimination and noted that the expulsion of the colonial powers from Asia was a "source of inspiration to the African people". Britain and France were called upon to withdraw their troops from Africa and to release the "gaoled leaders" in Kenya and elsewhere.¹⁹

Although these quoted statements were tempered with others more conciliatory towards the colonial powers and towards Britain in particular (which was acknowledged to be moving towards decolonisation in Africa), the general tone was, as we have seen, hostile to imperialism and critical of any perceived support which other powers were giving to Malan's government in South Africa. To an increasing extent Britain and the Commonwealth in general would be judged in the light of their commitment to non-racialism and decolonisation in Africa. In the case of Britain, as we shall see, this commitment was, in the eyes of the ANC, found to be severely

¹⁷ Ibid., p.4.

¹⁸ Ibid., Report of the National Executive Committee, Part 2, "World Situation", pp.5-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.6.

lacking.

(b) Britain, the Commonwealth and apartheid - an "acute dilemma"

In terms of British-South African relations it was undoubtedly true to say that the succession of Smuts by Malan in 1948 meant a significant change, that it brought a "new note of mutual reservation, of calculation and of reassessment" into the relationship.²⁰ As Peter Lyon has noted, "Smuts was quintessentially a pro-Commonwealth man; Dr Malan, initially at least, was not."²¹ It meant an "acute dilemma" for the British government which had to balance its awareness, on the one hand, of the sensitivities of the colonies and the Asian Commonwealth to apartheid, with, on the other hand, its need for maintaining friendly links with South Africa. The strategic and economic link meant that: "No British government would totally dissociate from South Africa",²² especially in a time of increasing Cold War tensions and especially in view of South Africa's "stranglehold" on the high commission territories. Thus, Britain was determined to retain South Africa in the "Commonwealth system of the 1940's" and so were the other dominions, as the "credibility" internationally of Britain and the Commonwealth could have been "seriously compromised" by the departure of a founder member.²³

The above-mentioned dilemma faced by Britain after 1948 had also, as we have seen, been faced during Smuts's period albeit not as acutely. The exigencies of the post-war economic crisis together with the much-changed international strategic situation made Britain's "appeasement" of South Africa a policy imperative for both Labour and Conservative governments and the succession of Smuts by Malan in South Africa made it even more urgent. Patrick Gordon

²⁰ Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies and Attitudes to South Africa 1948-1991", p.32.

²¹ Ibid. (See also Part 1, Introduction, p.11).

²² Ibid., p.33.

²³ Ibid.

Walker, Commonwealth secretary in the last two years of the Attlee government, gave his forthright assessment of the situation facing Britain in South Africa after Smuts in a cabinet memorandum of 1950.

He noted that the "accession to power of the National Party in South Africa after the general election in May 1948 had made the conduct of our relations a matter of some delicacy".²⁴ There were "extreme" elements in the National Party who were "anti-British". The Nationalists were republican in their aims, he noted, but they had a minority vote and only the "weightage" in the rural areas together with their Afrikaner Party alliance had given them a majority over the combined opposition. Although they still had no independent majority, he doubted whether Havenga could continue to prevent Nationalist measures such as those against the coloureds and the "Native Seats". The National Party had "consolidated its hold" (by winning the 6 seats in South West Africa) and "there seems no likelihood that it will be overthrown in the near future". Having lost Smuts (who died on 11 September 1950), the United Party "may not find a first class leader for some time or a really challenging policy".

It was apartheid, he continued, that really shocked the world and measures such as the Group Areas Act went "much further" than UP measures, although there seemed to be much support for them among the "British element". He went on to note how important India's attitude was for Britain: "Any suspicion that the United Kingdom sympathised in any way with South Africa's native policies would so deeply disturb African and Indian opinion in our African colonies as to constitute a threat to their internal security."

Despite the latter statement, Gordon Walker went on to present a number of reasons why it was important for Britain to "preserve good relations with South Africa": strategic and defence reasons such as Simonstown, Middle East commitments and uranium supplies; Malan's

²⁴ PRO, CAB 129/42, C.P.(50).214, "Relations with the Union of South Africa." Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 25 September 1950.

"staunch" anti-Communism, his help during the Berlin Crisis and his commitments to the UN effort in Korea; South African gold production which was "essential for the viability of the Sterling Area" and her value as an export market and investment field for the United Kingdom; the fact that the high commission territories could "at any time be economically strangled by the Union Government withholding essential facilities"; and, lastly, "our obligation to South Africa as a fellow Commonwealth member" which meant that even if she were to become a republic he hoped that she would remain in the Commonwealth.²⁵

Though there were many differences with South Africa, he continued, there was also much in common "and forty percent of the white population" was "of British stock". The "Commonwealth partnership" rested on the principle of partnership and any attempts to reach "complete identity of views" between all of its members would "break up the association overnight". In spite of difficulties, the relationship with the National Party government was "surprisingly good" and here Gordon Walker referred to "successful economic talks" the previous summer and to "promising" defence talks. It was therefore necessary, he wrote, to "avoid polemics" and to hope that the "extreme" and "parochial" views of National Party leaders would be modified by world opinion:

This is more likely to happen if we, for our part, show in our dealings with them that we appreciate the problem confronting them and do not simply adopt an attitude of condemnation.

Similarly, on the Indian question, "strict non-interference" at UNO was recommended as well as an attempt to exercise a "conciliatory influence from the background".²⁶ The United Kingdom should abstain from any "strongly condemnatory resolutions", as was the case with the South West African question.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

In conclusion, he said, the United Kingdom should "clearly" not associate itself too closely with South Africa's "native" policies and apartheid. However, the British attitude should be stated "as politely as possible" and should thus avoid "antagonising" South Africa. Britain should work with other Commonwealth countries and the USA to exercise a "moderating influence" on disagreements between South Africa and "other parties", ensuring "that we do not act alone as mediator in these disputes". Everything possible should be done to retain South Africa as a member of the Commonwealth, "preferably as one owing allegiance to the Crown" and, thus, to remain neutral in the Indian dispute and to try to persuade South Africa to secure agreement on South West Africa in the General Assembly.²⁷

Ingham has stated that as far as the governments of Attlee, Churchill and Eden were concerned, "the significance of the apartheid policy on the "evolving international situation after 1948 was not immediately evident in their relations with South Africa".²⁸ What Gordon Walker's cabinet memorandum shows, however, is that, in the case of the Labour government, the awareness of the effect of Britain's possible support for apartheid on public opinion in her African colonies was very much in evidence and that this was taken into account in her dealings with South Africa.

The fact that, as Ingham states, ministers of both Labour and Conservative governments showed very little desire in the 1950's to criticise South Africa's racial policies in public²⁹ was the result of a careful weighing-up of the possible alternatives and of the calculation that the benefits of not criticising South Africa outweighed the possible ill-effects.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ K. Ingham, "The British Government and Apartheid", Paper presented to the S.A. Historical Society Conference, Potchefstroom, February, 1993, p.6.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.6-7.

The cabinet discussion of Gordon Walker's memorandum illustrated this aspect of British policy-making towards South Africa. The alternatives of support or opposition to South Africa were fully discussed but in the end it was decided to endorse Gordon Walker's recommendations despite the objections of the minister of health, Aneurin Bevan, and of the colonial secretary, James Griffiths.³⁰ The latter had said that he was disturbed by the effects which the domestic policies of South Africa were causing in colonial territories and also by the indications of South African ambitions for control over other parts of Africa. He gave as an example "Afrikaner immigration" into Northern Rhodesia and said (in reply to Gordon Walker's arguments for preserving good relations with South Africa) that while he appreciated the economic and strategic advantage "of our present relations with South Africa", he feared that "a time might come when we should be forced to weigh these against our Colonial interests in other parts of Africa".

The minister of health, Aneurin Bevan, supported this view and referred to the "embarrassment" which the Union government caused United Kingdom ministers in their relations with their supporters in the United Kingdom and their international relations in the UNO. He suggested that if it continued the United Kingdom might have to consider whether she "lost more than she gained" by her present association with the Union government. Other ministers, however, stressed the importance of "securing South Africa's support in any struggle against Communism" and the "great value" of her likely military support in the Middle East. They referred to the "good progress" of defence discussions and "laid emphasis" on keeping South Africa in the Commonwealth.

Similarly, in 1951, after a tour to southern Africa and the high commission territories, Gordon Walker again expressed the importance to Britain of keeping on good terms with the Nationalist government. He noted that politics in South Africa were "sharp and bitter" and that the NP had "many characteristics of a devoted movement of

³⁰ PRO, CAB 128/18, C.M.62(50)4, "Relations with South Africa", 28 September 1950.

liberation", using Afrikaans as a "weapon" and still politically "fighting the Boer War".³¹ But as long as the NP maintained an anti-black attitude, he noted, they got "good British support in elections". This was needed to keep them in power but as soon as they pushed the anti-British line too far they lost good English support and then got more Afrikaner votes. Conscious of their isolation, they needed and valued British support, he said, especially in view of the "Communist danger", so they "flinch from a break" with the British and in defence matters, for example, the Nationalists were "more forthcoming than Smuts ever dared to be in peace-time".

Finally, Gordon Walker's memorandum discussed future policy in regard to South Africa. His advice was to "refrain from provocation" and rather to develop relations with South Africa that "bind her to us and make her unwilling to risk a break"- not to ostracise her because that would "gravely harm" Britain in the defence and economic fields and weaken her ability to deter South Africa from "foolhardy acts". It would also reduce the chances of "holding on to the Territories".³²

Gordon Walker's memorandum reveals the nuances of the official perceptions of South African politics held at the time by the Labour government. Once again, what stands out is the desire to avoid offending the Nationalists too much by criticising them and, instead, to advocate a policy of what later came to be called "Constructive Engagement" - encouraging the Nationalists to continue co-operation with Britain in defence, economic affairs and in the administration of the high commission territories with the hope that this would also result in a modification of their more extreme policies. If this meant sacrificing the interests of the "local

³¹ PRO, CAB 129/45, C.P. (51)109, "Visit by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations to the Union of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and the Three High Commission Territories of Basutoland, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland." Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 16 April 1951, p.7.

³² Ibid., p.14.

British", as Gordon Walker seemed to be hinting, and of the local black population in the process, it was not stated officially but was a logical deduction from the lack of importance assigned to such interests in the memorandum. The main priority was to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth and this meant, in effect, appeasing the Nationalist government instead of encouraging opposition to it inside the country.

Churchill's Conservative government, which returned to power at the end of 1951, continued to adopt much the same sort of attitude to South Africa, endorsing the previous government's approach (after some hesitation) on the Seretse Khama affair and on relations with the Union in general.³³ Lord Swinton, the Conservative secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, stressed the importance of South Africa's position in the Commonwealth and was anxious in negotiations over the protectorates and defence to put Malan's mind at rest concerning British aims in the African colonies.³⁴ Both Malan and his high commissioner in London, A.L. Geyer, thought that the accession to power of the Conservatives would mean better relations with South Africa although Geyer later acknowledged that the difficulties over the protectorates would continue and that the Tories were more concerned than Labour had been over the possibility of South Africa becoming a republic.³⁵

Peter Lyon notes that despite the attitude of non-interference adopted by both Tory and Labour governments to South Africa's race policies, an increasing amount of private disquiet was being

³³ PRO, CAB 129/50, C.(52)76, "Bamangwato Affairs", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 13 March 1952.

³⁴ PRO, CAB 129/61, C.(53)165, "Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 5 June 1953.

³⁵ Cape Archives (CA), A1890 (Geyer collection), Vol.1 (Correspondence: South Africa, 1950 Sept - 1953 Dec.), Memorandum vir Ontmoeting met Malan Januarie 1954, deur A.L. Geyer, n.d.

displayed "in the offices and corridors of Whitehall".³⁶ He quotes Sir Thomas Lloyd, permanent under-secretary at the colonial office, complaining to Sir William Strang at the foreign office of "numerous and growing embarrassments" flowing from the failure to denounce what he characterised as "reactionary South African policies".³⁷ He also mentions Sir Charles Jefferies of the colonial office expressing the view ("some eight years before this in effect became British policy"), that if a choice had to be made, then Britain would support a "parti-coloured [sic] Commonwealth" rather than South African membership.³⁸

But, Lyon notes, these remarks were only the "private communings of British officials",³⁹ which, although discussed, were rather quickly brushed aside. For example, in 1952 a response by the under-secretary at the Commonwealth relations office, Sir Percival Liesching, to a request by Lloyd that some form of public statement at ministerial level should be made which would indicate Britain's disapproval of South Africa's policies, was that such a statement was impossible as it would "make our position worse off than before we started".⁴⁰ Liesching claimed that when Malan criticised British policy he usually was careful to do so in such a way as to make a statement on "matters that are legitimately the concern of South Africa [such as the Gold Coast's membership of the Commonwealth]".⁴¹

As Ingham has pointed out, both Labour and Conservative MPs on the whole seemed to have accepted this official line with only a

³⁶ Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies", p.35.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ PRO, Dominions Office (DO), 35 (Miscellaneous Correspondence), File 2220 (1952: Constitutional Developments within the Commonwealth), No.3. Liesching - Lloyd, 15 September 1952.

⁴¹ Ibid.

"handful of exceptions".⁴² The exceptions were Labour's "anti-imperialist franc-tireurs", the Labour party "watchdogs" who continued to raise in the House of Commons the question of what instructions were given to the British representative at the UNO regarding attempts by other countries to put the question of South Africa's race policies on the agenda of the General Assembly. They were invariably fobbed off with the reply that such a subject did not fall within the competency of the UNO.⁴³

This cautious line on South Africa continued to be followed by British delegates to the United Nations and by those of other "white" Commonwealth countries. The non-interference clause of Article 2(7) was argued by Britain, Australia and New Zealand when in October 1952 the General Assembly decided to include "race conflict in South Africa" on its agenda for the first time. They voted against the resolution to have it included on the agenda, with the British delegate, Sir Gladwyn Jones, arguing that this was a matter of domestic jurisdiction and that it should be pursued individually but not through the channels of UNO.⁴⁴ An Australian observer, writing in Round Table, noted that "It would not be appropriate, nor possible for an Australian observer to pass judgment on South Africa's attempts to resolve her own domestic problems."⁴⁵

At Commonwealth prime ministers' conferences and other "official" meetings of Commonwealth members the non-interference rule continued to be obeyed as it had in the Smuts era. India complied with this rule as did the other Asian Commonwealth members, either because of a wish not to disrupt the fragile new association or because of

⁴² Ingham, "The British Government and Apartheid", p.7.

⁴³ Ibid., p.8.

⁴⁴ Commonwealth Survey (Central Office of Information, London), 1d. (Political), "UNO and South Africa's Racial Policy", October 1952, pp.37-38.

⁴⁵ "Commonwealth Relations: the Coronation Conference", Round Table, Vol. 43, 1952-53, pp.84-85.

local political reasons such as the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan.

At the coronation conference of prime ministers in London (during the crowning of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953) Nehru was asked by a television interviewer why he had not raised the racial issue at the conference. He replied that he had not done so because the conference was an occasion and a body "for seeking agreement and friendship rather than pressing on differences".⁴⁶ (The fact that the UNO provided an outlet for more bellicose criticism of South Africa must also have made it easier for Nehru to avoid it in Commonwealth circles).⁴⁷

However, when it came to less official kinds of Commonwealth contacts, such as the Commonwealth Relations conferences or the Parliamentary Association conferences, criticism of South Africa was much more in evidence. It was reported in 1949 from Ontario, where the third Commonwealth Relations Conference was being held, that speakers from the "African colonies" had expressed concern at South Africa's policies at the Ontario conference and that "frank and sincere" warnings had been given by Asian speakers.⁴⁸ South African speakers, on the other hand, "had not been convinced about the need for liberal policies".

At a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in New Zealand in November-December 1950 it was reported that the Indian delegate, Govind Das, "attacked Australia and South Africa with such vigour that the South African delegate left the room".⁴⁹ Similarly, at the 1954 Lahore Commonwealth Relations Conference, India and South Africa traded blows over immigration policy and the apartheid

⁴⁶ Round Table, Vol.43, 1952-53, pp.361-362.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.363.

⁴⁸ "The Commonwealth Relations Conference: A Canadian View", Round Table, Vol.41, 1949-50, pp.21-24.

⁴⁹ "New Zealand: Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference", Round Table, Vol. 41, 1950-51, pp.191-192.

system although a South African delegate dissociated himself from one of his colleagues' more abrasive remarks concerning India's "imperialist designs in Africa".⁵⁰

These remarks and reports indicate how South Africa's racial policies were continuing to affect South Africa's "behind the scenes" Commonwealth relations although at the top level of government representation the unwritten code of non-interference was still being maintained. The Nationalist government's own concern about "interference" from Commonwealth sources in South Africa's affairs was soon made known in public statements by senior ministers and by Malan himself. The minister for economic affairs, Eric Louw, stressed in a broadcast from the prime ministers' conference of October 1948 in London that the talks could only be useful and profitable at an "informal and consultative level" and with "due regard" being paid to the "independent status" of the dominions.⁵¹

An indication of the worries facing Malan in South Africa's relations with the Commonwealth and Britain in particular is given in a series of letters between him and South Africa's high commissioner in London, A.L. Geyer, in the period 1950-54. In September 1950 he wrote to Geyer about the possibility of sanctions being passed against South Africa in UNO because of the South West Africa situation. He felt that such action was unlikely because of South Africa's assistance to UNO in Korea and because "in any case, the Security Council would have to consider a United Kingdom veto".⁵² It would be very difficult, he continued, "for Britain to have to choose between her Commonwealth and the UNO" ("om dan te moet kies tussen sy statebond en die VVO").

⁵⁰ N. Mansergh, The Fifth Unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference, Lahore, Pakistan, Royal Institute of International Affairs (London, OUP, 1955), pp.99-100.

⁵¹ Commonwealth Survey, 1d (General), "Louw's Broadcast", October 1948, p.6.

⁵² CA, A 1890 (Geyer Collection), Vol.1, Malan-Geyer, 22 September 1950.

After Gordon Walker's visit to South Africa in 1951 Malan wrote to Geyer noting that Gordon Walker "made a good impression with us" and that he hoped he had a "good and thorough understanding of our policies".⁵³ But he feared that it would be difficult to please the Labour Party in general because their "Fabian ideology" allowed them, he claimed, "to be led by the nose by Nehru" ("aan die neus lei deur Nehru"). He predicted that relations between South Africa and Britain would be better if a Conservative government came to power.

But in 1954, after three years of the new Tory administration, Geyer gave a more realistic assessment of British-South African relations, noting that the Conservatives "had no real love for us"⁵⁴ ("het geen danige liefde vir ons nie") and were scared that at some stage "we would ...declare a republic" which might well be outside the Commonwealth. In the context of the protectorates he noted the "unpleasant fact" that South Africa's colour policies had no supporters worth speaking of in the United Kingdom and that it would be "suicidal" for any British administration to hand over the protectorates. He felt that South Africa was isolated on the "race question" and Britain's international position precluded any decision on handing over the protectorates.

That the Nationalists were aware of how far they could go in testing British resolve on questions such as South West Africa, the protectorates and race questions in general, is quite clear from the correspondence quoted above. At least on one aspect, the incorporation of the protectorates, they seemed to have come up against a non-negotiable option for Britain, despite, as we shall see, a considerable amount of vacillation on Britain's part during the Seretse affair. As to why the British refused to negotiate incorporation, the answer was partly given by Geyer in the memorandum quoted above: as he had said, no government in Britain

⁵³ A 1890, Vol.1, Malan-Geyer, 30 March 1951.

⁵⁴ A 1890, Vol.1, Memo vir Ontmoeting met Malan, Januarie 1954, n.d.

could afford to risk electoral suicide by handing over the protectorates to a government in South Africa which had aroused such opprobrium in world circles.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 5: Malan, the Protectorates and Britain - the "Seretse Affair"

(a) Introduction

During Smuts's post-war premiership considerable pressure had been applied in parliament by Nationalist speakers to try and persuade Smuts to take up the issue of incorporation of the high commission territories with Britain. Smuts had refused these representations and had only promised to take up the matter in a way which would not antagonise the British government and only when the time was "right". Such was the position when the Nationalists took office in May 1948.

To the National Party the high commission territories, or "protectorates", of Bechuanaland, Swaziland and Basutoland, represented open sores upon the map of South Africa. Those areas, the Nationalists argued, belonged geographically to the Union and had been excised "unfairly" by Britain in the previous century. It was difficult for Malan and his party to accept that South Africa, a sovereign country, should "harbour territories within its borders which were completely dependent upon the Union, but still controlled by another Power".¹ They felt that the appended schedule to the Act of Union, which had provided for the territories' incorporation subject to certain conditions guaranteeing land and other rights of the African inhabitants, was an insult to the integrity of white South Africans. How could Britain claim to treat South Africa as an equal member of the Commonwealth if she could not trust her in such an important matter at the same time?

Baring pointed out in despatches to Lord Addison, dominions secretary, that D.F. Malan's Nationalists essentially wanted transfer as a symbol of British confidence in South Africa's sovereign independence and because they felt the Act itself did not

¹ D.W. Krüger, The Making of a Nation, (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1969), p.259.

mention consultation² (although Baring had on occasions pointed out that the Aide Memoire appended to the Act committed Britain to consultation with native opinion and that most Africans opposed it, not just the "pliable chiefs" claimed by Malan). He concludes by saying that Baring succeeded well in preventing a clash with South Africa over the territories during his term and this in spite of little support from the dominions office and in the face of pressure from both Smuts and Malan. His "trump card" in discussions with Malan in 1949 had been the need for Union Africans to agree to persuade their cousins in the territories to consent to transfer, and as far as he could see that was out of the question.³

To the Nationalists, then, the issue became part and parcel of South Africa's constitutional position within the Commonwealth, a matter of prestige and a testing point for the assertion of status and sovereignty. In all of this they did not differ much from the aims and statements of many Smuts supporters and from Smuts's own frequent opinions on the matter over the previous forty years. What was different, however, was the force of Nationalist emotion behind it all and the determination to take matters further even if there was a risk of a rupture with Britain.

What made the issue even more urgent for the Nationalists was the systematic application of the new apartheid policy in South Africa. The danger to Nationalist authority and to the legitimacy of apartheid posed by the existence of a separate and (at least in theory), non-discriminatory system of colonial rule on South Africa's borders, was immediately apparent. While the high commission territories remained outside the net they represented potentially "subversive" examples of the "evils" of racial integration and miscegenation to the rest of the country. The latter fear became a distinct reality when the heir to the chieftaincy of the Bechuanaland Protectorate's largest chiefdom, the Ngwato, married a white woman and set in motion a crisis of the first

² Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, pp.167-168.

³ Ibid., p.168.

magnitude for South Africa's Commonwealth relations in the period 1949-52.

For the British Labour government the Seretse crisis could not have come at a more embarrassing time. Flushed with the success of the London Declaration of April 1949, which laid the groundwork for the new multi-racial Commonwealth, they now faced the first real test of their commitment to non-racialism in their own colonial backyard. In the eyes of the Empire's subject peoples they failed this test most dismally. In the eyes of majority black opinion in South Africa, Britain had sacrificed what was left of the loyalty of the African population by practising the most naked appeasement of the apartheid government. Liberal white opinion, while accepting the British rationale for the banning of Seretse, was disturbed by the increasing evidence of an official cover-up and of lies and deceit at the highest levels in Britain. Even Nationalist opinion in South Africa was upset by Britain's refusal to acknowledge the obvious - that it was pressure from their intrepid leader, Dr D.F. Malan, that had forced the mighty British government to back away from its hated liberal policies in Africa.

What emerges from a study of the motives and actions of British policy-makers during the Seretse affair is the desire to avoid at all costs a head-on collision with South Africa's new government. Such a collision could, it was claimed, have precipitated South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth and the loss of the protectorates. The alternative possibility, that Malan might have backed down if the British had shown resolve to stand up for their liberal principles, was hardly even considered at cabinet level. This latter alternative, which would have given considerable moral support to the increasingly disheartened forces of liberalism in South Africa, would have also increased Britain's prestige in the colonial world and could have greatly eased the task of decolonisation elsewhere. But that is speculation. What is certain, however, is that Britain's appeasement of South Africa over the Seretse affair caused great damage to her honour and prestige among African peoples and, in the longer term at least, did not succeed in

its main aim - the prevention of South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth. It did not even succeed in preventing Dr Malan from raising the issue of incorporation although, arguably, the force of his demands may have been reduced somewhat by what was in effect a trade-off concerning Seretse. By the time the Conservatives came to power in Britain the British attitude to South Africa's incorporation demands seems to have hardened to the point where it had, as Geyer noted in 1954, become a non-negotiable option.

At the same time, however, Churchill's government accepted virtually in toto the previous Labour policy on Seretse and refused to allow him back to the territory until 1956, using the same arguments about the need to avoid a head-on collision with South Africa as the Labour government had used when in power.

The actions and motives of the British Labour government concerning the Seretse affair have been examined in an account by Michael Dutfield, published in 1990, of the marriage of the London typist, Ruth Williams, to the Bamangwato heir, Seretse Khama.⁴ Drawing on cabinet and dominions office minutes and memoranda as well as newspaper reports and interviews with Lady Ruth Khama, the book was made into an Independent Television (ITN) documentary which aroused considerable controversy because of its focus on an aspect of British-South African relations long neglected and, perhaps, buried for the sake of diplomatic discretion.

Dutfield's conclusions about the British motives for refusing to allow Seretse to take up the chieftainship of the Bamangwato were as follows: Attlee's government was primarily concerned with the possibility that South Africa could leave the Commonwealth if the marriage went ahead and was anxious to secure guaranteed supplies of uranium from South Africa in order to complete the British nuclear bomb programme on schedule.⁵ The United States had, after the war,

⁴ Michael Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience: the Persecution of Ruth and Seretse Khama (London, Unwin Hyman, 1990).

⁵ Ibid., pp.99-100.

refused to allow her nuclear secrets to be spread to other countries, including her wartime ally, Britain. South Africa's uranium supplies represented the only significant Commonwealth sources of uranium for the British "A Bomb" programme and were necessary for the programme to be independent of US supplies. By 1948, despite long negotiations with Smuts's government, no conclusive agreement concerning the long-term sale of uranium had been signed.

Soon after the elections Malan's new government expressed the desire to conclude uranium negotiations as quickly as possible. This was mainly as a result of the South African balance of payments difficulties that emerged at the end of the year. However, in mid-1949 the Seretse affair came to the Nationalist government's unfavourable attention and Malan accordingly hinted at a delay in the convening of a conference on uranium supplies.⁶ He tried to play the British off against the Americans concerning these uranium supplies by requesting "special status" for South Africa concerning nuclear development⁷ and linked this demand to the question of the protectorates in general. Britain responded by refusing to allow Seretse to take up his rightful position in Bechuanaland. Dutfield claims that the real motive for the British action was not revealed in public.⁸ Officials such as Patrick Gordon Walker, secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, denied that any pressure had been placed upon Britain by the South African government and lied to parliament by saying that "no communication" had been received from the latter.⁹ The truth of the matter, claimed Dutfield, was that as the Labour back-bencher Fenner-Brockway argued, Britain had carried out a policy of naked "appeasement" of South Africa.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., p.103.

⁷ Ibid., p.104.

⁸ Ibid., pp.162-3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.185.

While the present writer has been unable to confirm in detail any of Dutfield's claims concerning uranium negotiations and their link with the Seretse affair, the central argument concerning British appeasement of Malan's government out of a fear that South Africa would leave the Commonwealth is amply justified and corroborated by even a cursory examination of the relevant British cabinet and dominions office files. It is also possible to offer the conjecture that atomic fuel considerations could well have played the part claimed by Dutfield because of circumstantial factors such as the timing of negotiations between the CDA (Combined Development Agency) and South Africa concerning uranium supplies.

In 1947 the British government was still reluctant to impart to Smuts's government information concerning the existence of the Combined Development Agency which was a US-British committee set up after the war to control and allocate uranium supplies. If its existence was known it was felt that South Africa and the US might come to some agreement or that the US might insist that South Africa fall within the ambit of the Agreement.¹¹ It was also acknowledged that there was "as yet" no question of a definite agreement with South Africa regarding supplies and that only "three persons" (besides Baring, the high commissioner) should at that stage know about the CDA - Forsyth, Smuts and the SA scientific adviser, Professor E. Schonland. A little later it was decided that "it was better to give South Africa the whole story rather than leave them to guess at it"¹² and so to tell a "narrow circle" about it.

South African scientists were already working with British and American counterparts at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the utilisation of low-grade uranium ores and British representatives in Washington believed that the South Africans must

¹¹ PRO, DO 35 (Original Correspondence 1926 - 1961), File 2488 (Atomic Energy: Information to be given to South Africa on US/UK Arrangements, 1947), No.1 D.E.H. Pearson-D.H.F. Rickett 3 January 1947.

¹² Ibid., No.6. D.H.F. Rickett-Sir J. Stephenson, 20 January 1947.

have already asked what interest the Americans had in South African ores and "may have received some hints" about the combined control by Britain and the US over supplies.¹³ On 7 February 1947 the Daily Express in London exposed a "British-US Plan" to develop atomic power from the South African gold mines and the British Embassy in Washington was asked to try and dampen the "speculation" caused by the article.¹⁴ The existence of the CDA soon became public knowledge, however, and Britain's attempts to come to some sort of separate deal with South Africa over uranium supplies became impossible.

It took almost three years before South Africa and the CDA came to an agreement. The delays by both the Smuts and Malan governments are discussed briefly in Dutfield's book and were, according to him, a result of attempts to play Britain and the United States off against each other in order to get the best possible terms for South Africa. The Seretse factor is also given as a reason for delay and Dutfield extrapolates that there is more reason to believe this because of the fact that he was not permitted to view files in South Africa on the Seretse affair which may have thrown more light upon the matter.¹⁵ However, from the terms of the agreement with the CDA signed in 1950 it is clear that some hard bargaining on South Africa's part must have taken place as Britain and the United States ended up guaranteeing South Africa the capital necessary to develop the uranium extraction process in return for defined annual tonnages of uranium to be shipped to those countries.¹⁶ Britain was to bear one third of the capital costs and the USA the rest.

In addition it is clear that South Africa was given continued access to defence research facilities in Britain. In 1952 Schonland, the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., No. 26., C.L. Wilson - R. Gordon Munro, 4 March 1947.

¹⁵ Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, pp.213-215.

¹⁶ Commonwealth Survey, Vol.3., No.5., "S.A. Uranium Industry", 5 March 1957, p.224.

scientific adviser to the South African government, was assured of such access after he had complained to a British representative that he was not getting enough information on UK defence research and was "contemplating resignation".¹⁷ The British representative noted that Schonland was a "friend of the United Kingdom", had been since World War II and "can be trusted". It was also noted that "in view of the South African political situation he can be of considerable use to us" and that "it could be worse" if he was not given information.¹⁸

As for the uranium agreement with the CDA, the British soon began to feel that they had been given a less than satisfactory deal. In 1953 it was doubted whether Britain could afford to reach the allotted capital expense requirement of £53m for the further development of uranium extraction mines.¹⁹ The British cabinet had, in April of that year, noted "the unsatisfactory nature" of "American restrictions" on technical information on atomic matters and also the agreement by the CDA on joint purchases of raw materials.²⁰ It was suggested that there was a need to free the United Kingdom from "these arrangements" by "making approaches" to Australia for uranium supplies once the extent of Australia's uranium resources were known. It was noted that the Labour government had "rebuffed" Australian advances in this regard in 1951 (partly because of American restrictions on information) but that "times had changed" and that Churchill should telegram the Australian prime minister, Menzies, with a renewed offer of agreement. In 1955 British negotiations to buy the output of "one or two Australian uranium mines" had come to the attention of the South African press and the

¹⁷ PRO, DO 35, File 2562 (Disclosure of Classified and Technical Information: Liaison with Prof. B. Schonland, Scientific Adviser to the South African Chiefs of Staff, 1952), No.1, F. Brundrett - Sir Ian Jacobs, 27 July 1952.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ PRO, DO 119, File 1160 (Uranium Loan Agreements), Letter from the CRO, London to R.C.C. Hunt, Pretoria, 29 May 1953.

²⁰ PRO, CAB 128/26, C.C.28(53)5, "Atomic Energy: Future External Policy", 21 April 1953.

South African secretary of mines had asked the CRO for any information concerning these negotiations for "public relations purposes".²¹ It was noted that even the South African official appreciated "that we will not want to have all our eggs in the South African basket".²²

What seems clear from the above negotiations concerning alternative Australian uranium supplies is that, firstly, the British had been unsure whether Australia's supplies would be reliable for the long-term, both in terms of quantities and in terms of the Australian political and strategic link with the USA. Secondly, it seems the British had gambled upon South Africa (initially under the Smuts government) being more reliable than Australia on both counts and the doubts of the mid-1950's indicated something of a policy miscalculation about Malan's future attitude to uranium supplies. These doubts must have partially cleared, however, when it became obvious that the Nationalists were not intending to place undue difficulties in the way of uranium supplies for the foreseeable future.

In the absence of further documentary evidence it is difficult to judge the significance of all the above-mentioned negotiations for British-South African relations in the period under review. It may well be, as Dutfield suggests, that the uranium negotiations were the deciding factor in the British decision to appease South Africa over the Seretse affair, but direct evidence of such a link at the highest levels of cabinet both in Britain and South Africa is lacking (in the case of the latter, because of the inaccessibility of cabinet documents). It is, perhaps, more useful to argue that the uranium factor was one among many, and definitely an important one, in the decision to ban Seretse from the chieftaincy of the Bamangwato tribe. It should be seen in the context of general economic, financial and strategic/military factors with the over-

²¹ PRO, DO 119, File 1165 (Uranium), Telegram from High Commissioner, Liesching, to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 10 September 1955.

²² Ibid.

riding fear of South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth predominating.

(b) The Seretse affair and the transfer issue

A study of the files of the British high commissioner in South Africa and of the British cabinet reveals just how important South African pressure (and to a lesser extent, pressure from Southern Rhodesia) was during the Seretse affair: pressure that was publicly and categorically denied by the British government. During 1948 and early 1949 it had gradually become known that the young heir to the Bamangwato, Seretse Khama, had, while studying in London, met and fallen in love with an English woman, Ruth Williams, and that he intended to marry her. He had ignored advice, both from the tribe itself (the regent chief Tshekedi opposed it on the grounds of tradition and the possible consequences for the tribe) and from political sources in South Africa and Britain, not to go ahead with the marriage. In July 1949 the high commissioner, Evelyn Baring, received a letter from the Southern Rhodesian prime minister, Sir Godfrey Huggins, concerning what the latter called "your White Chieftainess-to-be in Bechuanaland". The letter stated that

we consider an official Native-European union in Bechuanaland would increase our difficulties here, and also add a little fuel to the flames of the fire kept burning by our, fortunately diminishing, band of anti-native Europeans.²³

Baring's initial inclination had been to accept Seretse's decision to marry and to argue that nothing could be done about it since the tribe had accepted it at a third Kgotla (meeting) held to discuss the affair early in 1949. But he suddenly changed his mind after a talk with South Africa's external affairs secretary, D.D. Forsyth.

²³ PRO, DO 119, File 1282 (Native Affairs: Bamangwato Tribe: Marriage of Seretse Khama and Accession to Chieftainship), No. 12, Huggins - Baring, 7 July 1949.

On 30 June Lief Egeland, South Africa's high commissioner in London, had met Philip Noel-Baker, the Commonwealth secretary, and had communicated Malan's "grave view" of the marriage to the secretary of state.²⁴ Noel-Baker had asked Baring his advice and in Baring's initial reply of 5 July a policy of confirmation of Seretse's appointment as chief was recommended as the "only course to follow".²⁵ But by 11 July he had changed his mind, noting that "completely to reject the representation made by Dr Malan would lead to a head-on collision with the Union at the worst possible time and for the worst possible reason".²⁶

The high commission territories, he said, were economically dependent upon South Africa

and their very existence gives rise to such strong feelings among South Africans that it has always been our policy to avoid such a collision if avoidance is possible without paying too great a price.²⁷

His first reaction when he heard of the Bamangwato tribe's decision to recognise Seretse despite the prospect of having a "White Queen" was to recommend him, continued Baring. It was, he thought, better to face the "South African storm of criticism" sooner rather than later. He had always felt there was a "straight and unavoidable choice in our territories" between fostering and preserving the confidence of Africans on the one hand and maintaining good relations with South Africa on the other. If such a choice had to be made "relations with South Africa should be sacrificed".²⁸ But now, with great reluctance, he had come to the conclusion that he

²⁴ PRO, DO 119, File 1281 (1949: Native Affairs: Bamangwato Tribe.), No. 78, Noel-Baker - Baring, 2 July 1949.

²⁵ Ibid., No. 80, Baring - Noel-Baker, 5 July 1949.

²⁶ File 1282, No. 10, Baring - Liesching, 11 July 1949.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

had to advise otherwise because of the "disastrous results" such a collision with South Africa could have. As regards the Union, he said, the situation was "the gravest" he had faced since he first came to the country and the "impetus" for transfer of the protectorates had greatly increased.

He had sought Forsyth's help on 7 July and the latter had discussed it with Malan who had in turn instructed Forsyth to telegraph instructions to Egeland following the receipt of "the most forceful" representations from the executive council of the general assembly of the Dutch Reformed Church.²⁹ What was most important to South Africa was the official recognition of Seretse, not so much the possibility of him living there unrecognised with his wife. Godfrey Huggins had had the same meaning, he claimed. The political results of recognition would be to strengthen the hand of the NP against the UP and, "worse still", to strengthen the hand of the "Strijdom faction" against the "Malan faction" inside the NP itself. Strijdom, he noted, already had a majority in the NP caucus. Now that feelings were already "inflamed" over the Citizenship bill (which the UP was attacking as an attempt to destroy South Africa's Commonwealth connection ³⁰) Seretse would add "fuel to the fire" of the extremists. They would be able to say, he continued, that

our action demonstrates the folly of allowing the existence side by side in Southern Africa of two systems of Native Administration diametrically opposed to one another.³¹

They would say, Baring continued, that South Africa could not remain associated with a country which officially recognises an African chief married to a white woman and they would make Seretse's recognition " the occasion of an appeal to the country for the establishment of a republic, but of a republic outside the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See p.181.

³¹ Baring-Liesching, 11 July 1949.

Commonwealth". Malan "was worried" that he could not oppose an "extremist offensive" on these lines. Forsyth agreed with this and felt that the extremists would override the moderates, inflamed as they were by "constitutional developments in India" and exploiting the Nationalist emotions stirred up by the Citizenship bill, the unveiling of the Voortrekker Monument "next December", etc.

They would, he claimed, "use our action in order to obtain a mandate from the electors for the severance of the Commonwealth tie".³² Forsyth also felt defence discussions were in danger and Seretse's recognition "would provoke a reaction not against the Opposition in South Africa but against the United Kingdom government". Baring had "never known Forsyth to speak with such feeling". Baring went on to advise the need for a "play for time" and for a commission of enquiry which might have the effect of a "change of mind by Ruth Khama and Seretse as well as the Bamangwato tribe". At any rate, he concluded, "we should avoid a snub to the Union government. We would show that we realised the seriousness of the dispute just before the Voortrekker Monument Ceremony and we would prevent a too sudden break between the old and the new Native Administration".³³

Noel-Baker telegraphed Baring on 17 July to say that he was "not yet adequately informed about several aspects of the Seretse Affair" and reported that Noel Monks of the Daily Mail had said that the affair was "headline news" in the Union "just as the Apartheid programme was beginning [to be published] in the Native Language newspapers".³⁴ He wanted more information on this and on "any notable divergences between British and Dutch opinions" or on NP versus UP opinions. He asked:

Do you think that if we recognised Seretse and Ruth and if these events developed in the Union as Forsyth fears they might, the Nationalists would seize the opportunity to

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ File 1282, No.24, Noel-Baker - Baring, 17 July 1949.

occupy the High Commission Territories by force? ³⁵

On the 20th Baring replied that recognition "would weaken the liberals [in S.A.] by enabling the Nationalists to argue that ...there is no half way house between full apartheid and assimilation of races".³⁶ He said that "black opinion" in newspapers like Imvo and Ilanga had "ignored" the issue but that the Bantu World's editor, Selope Thema, a former natives' representative councillor, had in speeches "expressed himself against recognition" on the grounds "that the cause of Africans in the Union will thereby be damaged". Malan's moderates, he said, "may hope for non-recognition since they wish to preserve good relations with the United Kingdom" whereas Strijdom's extremists "may be saying nothing and holding fire then strike at relations after a decision". Those prone to violence might be likely to take action "on a wave of emotion".³⁷

By a false move we may damage both our case for retaining the High Commission Territories and the cause of all Africans in the South Africa.

Thus Baring hoped for a commission of enquiry to gain time "to judge the consequences of recognition and the development of the opinions of all Africans in Southern Africa and European well-wishers".

Baring felt strengthened in his opinion because of indications of support for it from the ranks of "Black opinion" and from celebrated liberals such as Archbishop Trevor Huddleston who had advised him to remove Seretse (but who reportedly regretted giving such advice much later).³⁸ Baring based his analysis of "Black opinion" on a survey of some prominent African newspapers like Bantu World, Imvo and

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ File 1282, No.29, Baring - Noel-Baker, 20 July 1949.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, p.93.

Ilanga Lase Natal whose editors, initially at least, were preoccupied about the challenge to traditional values posed by an inter-racial chieftaincy in Bechuanaland. Imvo's editor, according to Baring, had at first displayed a somewhat chauvinistic attitude by reportedly expressing "complete indifference" to the whole affair since it did not have anything to do with the Nguni peoples.³⁹

Ilanga's editor, R.R. Dhlomo, reportedly expressed the "strongest distaste" for Seretse's marriage but also resented the attitude of the Dutch Reformed Church (which had protested to Malan about the marriage on racial and religious grounds). He did, however, hope that Britain would not recognise Seretse.⁴⁰ Baring also reported that the king of Swaziland, Sobhuza II, had said to him that he would be "content" with a British decision not to recognise Seretse although he disliked the idea of a government decision overriding a customary meeting in a matter usually decided by custom.⁴¹ Selope Thema and Dr Xuma reportedly also opposed recognition, said Baring, and only a Mr Ngakane of the Bantu Welfare Trust in Johannesburg felt that he should be recognised although his children should not be allowed to succeed to the chieftomship.⁴²

In November the attitude of Ilanga Lase Natal confirmed Baring's letter to Noel-Baker. In an editorial entitled "Is the African Doomed?" an oblique reference to the Seretse affair was made in which inter-racial marriage was condemned because "In the process the Black man as such loses his identity because he does not reproduce himself".⁴³ Selope Thema's Bantu World meanwhile refrained from editorial comment but continued to report developments such as

³⁹ PRO, DO 119, File 1286, No.46B, "Some Aspects of Public Opinion in the Union Regarding the Recognition of Seretse", Memorandum by the High Commissioner, Baring - Noel-Baker, 10 December 1949.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ilanga Lase Natal, 19 November 1949.

the appointment of the Harrigan commission of inquiry into the effects of the marriage on the Bamangwato Tribe.

Within the ranks of the CRO in London meanwhile, it was reported that Liesching (permanent secretary) had said to Noel-Baker that he supported the colour bar in South Africa and that the Seretse marriage would be an "inflammatory act" in the colonial territories.⁴⁴

As far as Liberal opinion was concerned, Baring claimed that in the Cape, liberals would criticize non-recognition but that J.D. Rheinallt-Jones, the former Transvaal natives' senator, had told him that only a "small minority" in general would criticise it and a majority would welcome non-recognition "thinking that it would strike a blow at liberalism if allowed".⁴⁵ Baring then claimed that all he had spoken to thought it would give a "heaven-sent" opportunity to attack Britain's retention of the high commission territories and even South Africa's links with the rest of the Commonwealth. It was, he said, particularly "unfortunate" that it should happen at a time when Malan's "blundering tactics" made it impossible to present the case for incorporation as being from a "united South Africa". The Nationalists could say that the Seretse affair would justify their position even more because it encouraged mixed marriages.

In October Malan had given advance notice to the British of his intention to press for incorporation again ⁴⁶ and had made a speech to the Orange Free State NP congress on the 26th in which he said he had raised the question in London in April at the Commonwealth

⁴⁴ Dutfield, Marriage of Inconvenience, p.98.

⁴⁵ PRO, DO 119, File 1286, No.46B, "Some Aspects of Public Opinion in the Union Regarding the Recognition of Seretse", Memorandum by the High Commissioner, Baring - Noel-Baker, 10 December 1949.

⁴⁶ PRO, DO 121/25 (Minutes to Prime Minister from the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations), File A14/49, Addison- Attlee, 31 October 1949.

conference and that he intended to press for a reply in a reasonable period of time.⁴⁷ He had also made a number of speeches condemning the marriage and calling on the British either to repudiate it or to the face the consequences of a demand by his government to incorporate the territories into the Union in the new year.⁴⁸ The South African government then declared Ruth and Seretse prohibited immigrants.

These approaches had caused considerable consternation at the Commonwealth relations office and the acting Commonwealth secretary, Lord Addison, had advised Attlee to draw up a cautious reply to Malan because it was a "delicate and difficult" issue.⁴⁹ He noted that Malan had warned in his speech that Britain could not say no to an "official" Union government approach as opposed the previous "personal requests" of Smuts and Hertzog. Addison also noted that Malan had threatened to take the issue to the Privy Council if representations to the United Kingdom government failed (an incongruous statement considering his party's desire to abolish appeals to that same body).

In this memorandum to Attlee Addison enclosed a suggested draft copy of a reply to Malan saying that Britain was "anxious" about relations between Britain and South Africa "in a time of great danger in the field of international politics and economics" and that these relations could suffer if the issue of incorporation were to be raised.⁵⁰ The draft letter would also point out that Britain could not reach a solution without regard to pledges made at various times and without the approval of parliament. It would say to Malan that Britain would not want to intrude in the domestic affairs of South Africa but that at the "present time" there was "no prospect"

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.187.

⁴⁹ PRO, DO 121/25, File A14/49, Addison - Attlee, 31 October 1949.

⁵⁰ PRO, DO 121/25, File A14/49, Addison - Attlee, 31 October 1949.

of proposals to effect a transfer being able to obtain appreciable support, "much less a majority", in parliament in Britain. It concluded by saying that the time was not "opportune" and the only practical outcome would be to "place a severe strain" on the good relations between the two countries.

While Malan was increasing his pressure on Britain for transfer the British cabinet was awaiting the report of a judicial enquiry into Seretse's position as chief: a report which the cabinet had commissioned after Noel-Baker had outlined the consequences (as seen from Baring's point of view) for British-South African relations of recognising Seretse.⁵¹ The terms of reference of the enquiry had been narrowly circumscribed to have nothing to do with race relations but only with the "well-being" of the Bamangwato and the "stability" of the future administration. When the Report was presented, however, Noel-Baker immediately saw its potential for embarrassment and urged its suppression.⁵²

The enquiry had concluded that the only important reason for withholding Seretse's candidature was that it might damage Bechuanaland's relations with South Africa. Noel-Baker's cabinet memorandum of 26 January 1950 recommended that his reasons for the non-recognition of Seretse (damage to the tribe as a result of the split opinion on the marriage) be used, not those of the enquiry.⁵³ He suggested an early announcement of Seretse's removal from the Protectorate and the drawing up of a White Paper. It was, he felt, important to do this because Malan would soon announce his intention to press for transfer of the protectorates and "if we refused recognition of Seretse after this announcement it would seem that

⁵¹ PRO, CAB 128/9, C.M.47(49)8, "Bechuanaland Protectorate: Chieftainship of the Bamangwato Tribe", 21 July 1949.

⁵² Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, p.132.

⁵³ PRO, CAB 129/38, C.P.(50)13, "Bechuanaland Protectorate: Succession to the Chieftaincy of the Bamangwato Tribe", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 26 January 1950.

South Africa forced us to".⁵⁴ An early announcement might prevent these demands for transfer from taking place, he argued.

Noel-Baker's memorandum was discussed by the British cabinet on 31 January and there the Commonwealth secretary argued again that the enquiry's reasons for non-recognition could not be accepted.⁵⁵ The enquiry, he said, had "underestimated" the risk that recognition would result in the "disruption" of the tribe and that liberal European opinion was against it as was "responsible" native opinion. It was not "wholly realistic" to ignore South African opinion and the future relations with South Africa. It seemed that "at present" South Africa was not going to press the issue of transfer but that this could change if Seretse were to be recommended. The colonial secretary, A. Creech-Jones, agreed with Noel-Baker and said the reasons given by the enquiry could "give rise to damaging controversy in this country or in Africa". After discussion the cabinet decided to invite Seretse and his wife to London to persuade him to relinquish the chieftainship and also to recall all copies of Noel-Baker's memorandum which had summarised the enquiry's report.⁵⁶

Events thereafter moved swiftly to a head. At the meeting in February between Seretse and CRO officials Seretse accused Noel-Baker of refusing his chieftainship "for fear of annoying Malan's government...and the Southern Rhodesian government", both of which, he said, believed in the "persecution of native people".⁵⁷ Noel-Baker denied this "emphatically" and pointed to the British policy concerning the Central African Federation and to her refusal to hand over the protectorates as proof of Britain's intent "to do

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ PRO, CAB 128/17, C.M.13(50)1, "Bechuanaland Protectorate:Chieftainship of the Bamangwato Tribe", 31 January 1950.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ PRO, DO 119, File 1288, No.75, "Note of a Meeting at C.R.O. Office", 15 February 1950.

the right thing regardless of South African or Rhodesian views".⁵⁸ Seretse said he would respect confidence on the issue but he held to his views concerning Malan and South Africa. He asked to see the report of the commission of enquiry and Noel-Baker refused. It had already been decided to hold over any decision on what to do until the British general election was over if Seretse refused to step down.⁵⁹ It had also been decided to offer him what Dutfield claims was a "bribe" to stay out of the territory⁶⁰, but what Noel-Baker called an "allowance " (of £1100 a month).⁶¹

In the meantime a draft White Paper had been circulated which announced non-recognition on the grounds of the well-being of the Bamangwato tribe but which, as Baring had suggested,⁶² denied that the effect of "impaired relations with the Union" was a factor, but which stated that the British government "were mindful" of such an effect. He was worried that it might "unnecessarily" aggravate European feeling in the Union "to indicate quite so pointedly that the Union Government's views were an irrelevant consideration". Baring had also suggested that Paragraph 12 of the Draft be amended to say that African opinion in the Union was not "unanimous" but that "responsible opinion" was against recognition.⁶³

On 6 February Baring had told Noel-Baker that South African papers were reporting a likely negative decision by the Judicial enquiry.⁶⁴

On 13 February the Cape Argus reported that the British Cabinet

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ CAB 128/17, C.M.4 (50)2, 7 February 1950.

⁶⁰ Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, p.137.

⁶¹ DO 119, File 1288, No.1, Noel-Baker - Baring, 2 February 1950.

⁶² DO 119, File 1287, No.33, Baring - Noel-Baker, 23 January 1950.

⁶³ File 1287, No.34, 23 January 1950.

⁶⁴ DO 119, File 1288, No. 10, Baring- Noel-Baker, 6 February 1949.

would be likely to take into account the "bitter hostility" among the Europeans of South Africa and Rhodesia and it would most likely increase the "strained relations" in a part of the Commonwealth "where a delicate situation...existed".⁶⁵ On the other hand, it noted, rejection of Seretse "could provoke millions still under colonial rule". Therefore a compromise was likely because

it is known that the Union's Prime Minister is holding up formal presentation of his case for the incorporation of the three British Protectorates ...until a decision on Seretse is taken. Non-recognition...may strengthen the hands of the British Government in resisting these claims.⁶⁶

After the general elections in Britain in late February 1950 (in which the Labour Party was returned to power with a considerably reduced majority) Noel-Baker, reportedly "sickened" by the whole Seretse affair,⁶⁷ was replaced by Patrick Gordon Walker as secretary of state for Commonwealth relations. Gordon Walker is described by Dutfield as being considerably more ruthless than his predecessor in dealing with Seretse.⁶⁸ One of his first actions was to insist to cabinet that Seretse be banned from the Protectorate. This decision was communicated to Baring in Cape Town on 6 March together with the draft text of a statement to be read to the House on 13 March.⁶⁹ The draft statement stated that His Majesty's government "have decided after the most careful consideration of all relevant facts that in the present circumstances they cannot recognise Seretse as Chief and that recognition must be withheld for five years". Seretse had been told that HMG had to take into account "sources of information and

⁶⁵ Cape Argus, 13 February 1950.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Dutfield, Marriage of Inconvenience, p.149.

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp.150-1.

⁶⁹ DO 119, File 1289, No.23, Gordon Walker - Baring, 6 March 1950.

experience which were not available to the Tribe itself". Despite this, he had "still not agreed to voluntary relinquishment".⁷⁰

On 7 March, Die Burger reported that no reason had been given for Seretse's removal except that it would cause a disturbance if he was recognised and claimed that he had been offered £11000 p.a. to stay in Britain but had refused.⁷¹ Seretse considered himself "double-crossed", the report noted and if he were to return he would most likely be "kicked out". "It was firmly believed in Bechuanaland that there was South African pressure behind the whole thing", it concluded.

Baring telegraphed Gordon Walker on the following day to say there was a need to "correct" local press reports concerning the £11000 offered to Seretse because "it should be £1100 " and it "makes [a] very bad impression".⁷² He enclosed reports of local newspaper commentary and said that the UP paper, Die Suidersstem, had welcomed the British decision "on behalf of South Africa and all the white territories North of the Limpopo".⁷³ On the following day, however, he telegraphed Liesching to say that not all local comment was "favourable" and that after conversation with the Ballingers he was told the feeling was that Britain "might not be giving all reasons to public".⁷⁴

On 10 February Baring reported a Manchester Guardian article which quoted the previous secretary of state, Noel-Baker, as saying that there had been "no communication" with South Africa over Seretse.⁷⁵ The same article, however, stated that "we all know the attitude

⁷⁰ File 1289, No.34, Gordon Walker - Baring, 6 March 1950.

⁷¹ Die Burger, 7 March 1950.

⁷² DO 119, File 1289, No.42, Baring - Gordon Walker, 8 March 1950.

⁷³ File 1289, No.51, Baring - Gordon Walker, 8 March 1950.

⁷⁴ File 1289, No.60, Baring - Gordon Walker, 9 March 1950.

⁷⁵ File 1289, No.69A, Baring-Sillery, 10 March 1950.

which is unhappily the attitude of many South Africans besides Dr Malan and his friends" and that the threat of the Nationalists to incorporate the high commission territories "hangs over the affair". The United Kingdom, had "sacrificed Seretse...with compensation...in order to defend the better all the peoples of the Protectorate". Only "time would show" if the government had chosen the right course, the report concluded.

Baring suggested to the regional commissioner in Mafeking, in response to this article, that he should hint in "a personal view" if asked by the press that the press should realise the "incalculable effect upon future well being of all inhabitants of High Commission Territories in view of repercussions which might have been aroused in Union". On the same day he telegraphed Gordon Walker to say that he was "most grateful for firm line taken by the United Kingdom Government. A major disaster has been avoided and effect upon our relations with Union has been admirable."⁷⁶

As Baring himself admitted, however, local press reaction represented a "sharp cleavage of opinion".⁷⁷ The Cape Argus gave its "unqualified support" to the decision as the "wisest in unusually difficult circumstances", while Die Suiderstem and Die Volkstem "warmly supported it" (both UP newspapers).⁷⁸ The Star, however, was critical of the methods used and the decisions taken "in strongly worded and general terms".⁷⁹ The Cape Times, Baring reported, failed to see how the decision to ban Seretse "would be justified in five years time if it could not be justified now" and accused the UK of a "lack of frankness" in its "personal relations" with Seretse. Die Burger gave its "complete support" as did Die Volksblad of Bloemfontein, but Die Vaderland agreed "less strongly" while Die Transvaler, in an "obviously angry edition", criticised the slowness

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ File 1289, No.73, Baring - Gordon Walker, 10 March 1950.

⁷⁸ File 1289, No.75A, Baring - Gordon Walker, 10 March 1950.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

of the UK in reaching a decision.⁸⁰ The latter, noted Baring, "lent colour" to his view that Strijdom's followers, as distinct from the more moderate views of Die Burger, "hoped we would recognise Seretse".⁸¹

South Africa's high commissioner in London, Lief Egeland, in the meantime wrote to Forsyth to say that Gordon Walker had told him confidentially that the UK would not "weaken its attitude" despite Seretse's "premature" disclosure to the press on 7 March of the pressure put on him by the British government.⁸² Gordon Walker had told him, furthermore, that he was confident of being able to handle the "Left Wing" of the Labour Party and of securing the co-operation of the Tory opposition. The findings of the Harrigan Commission (the judicial enquiry) would not be published and Seretse "was fully aware he could be ejected if he set foot in Bechuanaland". Unfortunately, continued Egeland, there was "not anyone else to install as Chief....since Seretse, besides Tshekedi, was the last of the Khama dynasty ...to which Bechuanaland was deeply attached".⁸³

The decision to ban Seretse for five years had, however, been leaked to the press before Seretse had been officially told of it and consequently the Conservative opposition in Britain were "fiercely critical".⁸⁴ Churchill concentrated on the "point of honour - or rather dishonour - involved in the possibility that Seretse did not know he was to be excluded from returning home when he was originally invited to London. Said The Times, in response, "No good can come of compromise involving injustice to individuals if its aim is to blur the outline of the truth."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² File 1289, No.81A, Egeland - Forsyth, 8 March 1950.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.190.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.191.

On 15 March Baring wrote to Gordon Walker to say that there was "growing appreciation" in some English-language newspapers of the British point of view and that there was a "demand for more information".⁸⁶ Evidence of such appreciation was in the form of a "second favourable leader" in the Cape Argus urging the UK government to "to maintain their position".⁸⁷

A leading article in the Sunday Times had also approved of the decision, giving reasons for it "apart from the attitude to the colour bar" in South Africa and in Southern Rhodesia.⁸⁸ The Natal Mercury had given a "violent and confused" denunciation of the UK government before the British public statement.⁸⁹ From the Cape Times, however, there had been a "change of attitude" in a leading article of 13 March. It reportedly condemned the "inaccuracies, exaggerations and omissions" about the Seretse "agitation".⁹⁰

The Sunday Times, however, had demanded more information in an article entitled "A Case for Candour" and asked for a fuller statement from the British government to avoid "further propaganda or detriment to Britain".⁹¹ It asked for the judicial enquiry report to be published or for a White Paper to be issued to bring the "unfortunate matter" into perspective.

Baring reported further that at an interview with the press in Serowe, the Bamangwato headquarters, the representatives of The Star, the East London Daily Despatch and Rand Daily Mail had been critical of the lack of information and had made it clear that they considered what had really happened was the "sacrifice of Seretse to

⁸⁶ PRO, DO 119, File 1290, No.18, Baring - Gordon Walker, 15 March 1950.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

save the High Commission Territories from Transfer".⁹² He concluded with a suggestion to Gordon Walker that a White Paper "may be necessary to prove that we had in mind the interests of the Africans of the High Commission Territories as a whole".⁹³ In view of the "attacks on the good faith" of the UK government, he added, "another statement concerning the economic position and geographical weakness of the British position in Southern Africa...should be made".

On 16 March the ANC made its position clear in opposition to the British position despite an earlier statement by Dr Xuma on the issue. Dr Xuma had earlier supported non-recognition⁹⁴ but that had been before the growing evidence of deceit, South African pressure and of an official cover-up in Britain had begun to emerge. On the 16th the regional commissioner in Mafeking telegraphed Baring to say that he had received a telegram from the ANC saying:

National Congress views with grave concern and alarm the decision of the British Government to ban Seretse from his homeland. It is felt that the banishment and the manner in which it was made has destroyed perhaps forever what confidence Africans had in the integrity and honour of the British Government. Congress demands the immediate lifting of the ban and the recognition of Seretse Khama as ruler of the Bamangwato people - General Secretary, ANC.⁹⁵

In February Ilanga had indicated some shift in its earlier stance of indifference, if not active distaste for the whole affair, by noting in an article entitled "Seretse's Fate Sealed?" that the event had

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ File 1286, No.46B, "Some Aspects of Public Opinion in the Union Regarding the Recognition of Seretse", Memorandum by the High Commissioner, Baring - Noel-Baker, 10 December 1949.

⁹⁵ File 1290, No.33, Sillery - Baring, 16 March 1950.

"shaken race relations throughout the world".⁹⁶ The article concluded with the words: "It is learnt that the attitude of the South African Government has not been overlooked by the British authorities."⁹⁷

Bantu World, however, continued to oppose the marriage on the grounds of tribal tradition and claimed in March that Seretse "must have known that he was putting that tradition in jeopardy".⁹⁸ The newspaper did note, however, that: "Until all facts are known, no correct judgment [on the British decision to ban Seretse] can be made."⁹⁹

Dutfield describes the growing storm of protest in Southern Africa and in Britain after the official announcement of Seretse's five - year ban on 13 March 1950. In the House of Commons the leader of the opposition, Winston Churchill, accused the Labour government of having "tricked" Seretse and asked for an assurance from the Labour Party that no South African pressure had been applied.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, however, Attlee was working with Conservative leaders to adopt a bi-partisan approach to the Seretse affair and it was agreed between them not to allow publication of the judicial enquiry report.¹⁰¹ Gordon Walker denied again in parliament that there had been any South African pressure¹⁰² and Baring himself refused to be drawn on the same question at a meeting of the Bamangwato Kgotla.¹⁰³ The possibility of riots in Serowe was discussed by Baring who expressed the fear that South Africa might be tempted to send troops

⁹⁶ Ilanga Lase Natal, 4 February 1950.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Bantu World, 25 March 1950.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, p.164.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.161.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp.162-3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.172.

to restore order¹⁰⁴. At a public meeting in London organised by Labour Party Independents, the accusation arose that Labour was "no better than the Tories"¹⁰⁵ and black organisations throughout the Commonwealth and Empire voiced their protests.

The South African Labour Party weekly journal, Forward, commented on 17 March under the title, "Disturbing Aspects of Britain's decision on Seretse", that Gordon Walker's statement in the House of Commons was "most unsatisfactory and reflects credit neither on the Commonwealth Relations Office nor on the British Government as a whole".¹⁰⁶ It noted that the decision to exclude Seretse for five years "may or may not be justified" but that Gordon Walker gave "no single argument to show that it was". The editor concluded by affirming his distaste (and that of most of the English white working class that he represented in his columns) for inter-racial matrimony and noted:

Let me make it clear that this paper no more approves of mixed marriages than does anyone else in South Africa. But it does stand for fair play, especially by a trustee towards one of its wards.

On 17 March the regional commissioner in Mafeking sent Baring further evidence of mounting opposition to the British decision. He enclosed a copy of the "Manifesto of Non-Co-operation" drawn up by the leaders of the Bamangwato.¹⁰⁷ It talked of South African and Rhodesian pressure and stated:

It is also commonly known that in recent years the attitude of the British Government has shown a tendency to uphold the Union's colour policy as evidenced by her stand

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.173.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁰⁶ Forward, 17 March 1950.

¹⁰⁷ DO 119, File 1290, No.61A, Sillery - Baring, 17 March 1950.

in the UNO's discussions on Native policy. It has also become clear, generally speaking, that the maintenance of the paramountcy of native interests which has been the guiding principle in British Colonial Administration, is giving way, under continued white pressure, to the ascendancy of the European interests in British African possessions south of the Sahara. It seems clear therefore that the claims of smaller territories to the right of self-determination in their domestic affairs can be trampled with impunity.¹⁰⁸

The manifesto went on to pledge loyalty to Seretse, to fight the British government with all the resources of the tribe, to refuse direct rule and to announce a policy of non-co-operation while Seretse was excluded from the Protectorate. It also appealed to the rest of the world to pressurise the United Kingdom.

On the 20th March, Baring saw Smuts who told him that if Seretse were to be recognised, Malan

would be able so to play on the emotions of White South Africans of both sections that their feelings would become inflamed and they would unite together to urge transfer of the High Commission Territories to the Union with a force and a persistence which we would not be able for long to resist.¹⁰⁹

The Nationalist Party, Smuts had continued to say to Baring, would then discard its Afrikaner Party allies and fight an early election on transfer of the territories and on a republic outside the Commonwealth. It would argue the necessity of ensuring white supremacy by breaking the links with a country "which both officially championed mixed marriages and also gave way to agitation among Africans in a territory close to the Union and over which

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ File 1291, No.5, Baring - Gordon Walker, 20 March 1950.

South Africans felt that they held a kind of option".¹¹⁰ Baring felt so "anxious" about what Smuts had told him and about a possible cave-in by the British government that he wanted to consult with Gordon Walker personally in order to stiffen the government's resolve concerning Seretse's banning order.¹¹¹

On the same day Gordon Walker wrote to Baring to say that Attlee had approved last-minute alterations to the draft White Paper on Seretse and that it had been "rushed to publication".¹¹² He told Baring that the opening sentence of Paragraph 16 had been altered to say that no representations had been received from the Union's government and that this alteration had met with Attlee's approval.¹¹³ A few days later he replied to Baring's telegram concerning Smuts's views and said he "appreciated the difficulties concerning the Union" and that if pressed he would take the line that the words he had used on 16 March "speak for themselves" (ie. Seretse would be banned for 5 years at least) and that "we had nothing more to add".¹¹⁴ He suggested that Baring visit London to discuss what would happen when the period covering Seretse's specific grounds for his presence in the Protectorate expired. There was, he noted, "a law suit to consider" as well as Seretse's wife's confinement. In case Baring's recall was "misconstrued" it would be called a "visit" unless a change of plans took place.¹¹⁵

In the meantime, a question had been asked in the South African parliament concerning the Seretse issue by the natives' representative for Western Cape, Sam Kahn. The Cape Argus reported that Kahn had asked Malan whether there had been any communication between his government and Britain concerning Seretse. Malan had

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² File 1291, No.10, Gordon Walker - Baring, 20 March 1950.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ File 1291, No.34, Gordon Walker - Baring, 24 March 1950.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

replied that he had nothing to add to what was said in the British White Paper which had been issued on 22 March.¹¹⁶ When Kahn asked whether this reply meant that no communication had been received Malan said, "My reply has already been given". Kahn then stated that a direct reply had not been given to his question and the Speaker said, "A Minister is free to reply as he wishes."

Gordon Walker, who had received notification of this question and of Malan's reply wrote to Baring to say he had discussed it with Egeland who had sent a "comprehensive and useful" telegram to his government suggesting "how the matter should be handled if it is pursued further at their end".¹¹⁷

On 27 March Baring wrote back to say that the effect of the publication of the White Paper had been "very good" in South Africa and that there was a "fuller appreciation" of the UK point of view.¹¹⁸ The Star said (on 23 March) that it was unlikely that in five years' time the UK would reconsider the decision and hoped that by then the affair would be forgotten.¹¹⁹ The Cape Argus said the White Paper presented a valid case for a UK decision and that although there had been no SA pressure "it is plain enough that the British Government has a shrewd notion of what the Union Government feels about the matter".¹²⁰ Die Burger, on 23 March, praised the White Paper but hoped that the UK Government would not be influenced by an "inflamed, clamorous and uninformed mass of public opinion" to amend its decisions.¹²¹ This, said Baring, showed there was an intention on the part of the Nationalists to use the Seretse affair in support of their demands for transfer "if there is any change in

¹¹⁶ Cape Argus, 24 March 1950.

¹¹⁷ DO 119, File 1291, No.39, Gordon Walker - Baring, 24 March 1950.

¹¹⁸ File 1291, No.58, Baring - Gordon Walker, 27 March 1950.

¹¹⁹ The Star, 23 March 1950.

¹²⁰ Cape Argus, 23 March 1950.

¹²¹ Die Burger, 23 March 1950.

the attitude of the UK Government".¹²²

On 5 April Gordon Walker expressed his concern to Baring that if Southern Rhodesian troops were used to man armoured cars in the event of trouble in the Protectorate, there might be an "awkward reaction" from the Union.¹²³ The Union might object, he said, on the grounds that they themselves could readily have supplied Britain an armoured force. He was also concerned about the reaction in the Protectorate if Southern Rhodesian troops fired upon the Bamangwato and asked Baring whether it would be better to fly in British troops to man the armoured cars borrowed from Southern Rhodesia.

A letter to Baring of 6 April by the Chairman of The Bantu Press Pty (Ltd), B.G. Paver in Johannesburg, summarised some comments in the black press and noted there was "a strong feeling" that the South African and Southern Rhodesian governments had "influenced the decision".¹²⁴ Die Transvaler on 10 March had claimed that Gordon Walker's statement about South African and Rhodesian influence was not true and that there was no other reason than Seretse's marriage: While trying with words "to prop up the white-washed facade of liberalism", said the newspaper, the British Government had in practice conceded to the demands of apartheid. "This proves that reality wins as it always and increasingly must win against impracticable drawing-room theories of liberalism."¹²⁵

It described Gordon Walker's reasons as "pure diplomatic eyewash" and said that Malan had announced on 27 October 1949 that the British Government had been informed by telegram of the Union's attitude to the marriage.¹²⁶ The Bantu World, on the other hand,

¹²² DO 119, File 1291, No.58, Baring - Gordon Walker, 27 March 1950.

¹²³ File 1292, No.31, Gordon Walker - Baring, 5 April 1950.

¹²⁴ File 1292, No.43H, B.G.Paver (Chairman, The Bantu Press Pty (Ltd), Johannesburg) to Evelyn Baring, 6 April 1950.

¹²⁵ Die Transvaler, 10 March 1950.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

had continued to argue on 25 March that the marriage was not in the interests of the welfare of the Bamangwatwo and that "neither Black nor White desire inter-marriage because both have a pride in their own race".¹²⁷

Baring wrote back to Paver asking him not to publish a particularly critical article which had been sent to him from the editor of "an independent weekly" called The Forum.¹²⁸ The article, entitled "Britain: a Jealous God" was written by L.D. Raditladi, an exile "of longstanding" from the Bamangwato Reserve and related to the Khamas. It accused the Labour government of dictatorial tendencies, scoffed at Gordon Walker's denial of Union influence and said that with Afrikaners "at least you know where you stand". Baring stated that the article, if published, "would not really do us any good".¹²⁹ Even if refuted in the next issue, he said, "some of the misstatements [were] bound to stick in people's minds and might do a lot of harm". He suggested withholding it on the grounds that "it was not signed".¹³⁰

By June the Labour government, which had been showing signs of "tottering"¹³¹ under the pressure of hostile public opinion at home and abroad, had decided reluctantly to exile both Ruth and Seretse from Serowe. Dutfield described a mood of "self-congratulation" setting in, from Baring in particular, now that Seretse had been removed.¹³²

It appears that Baring had been prepared to resign over the issue, particularly when he became aware that the government was "not

¹²⁷ Bantu World, 25 March 1950.

¹²⁸ DO 119, File 1293, No.42, Baring - Paver, 2 May 1950.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Dutfield, A Marriage of Inconvenience, p.173.

¹³² Ibid., p.208.

entirely happy with his advice".¹³³ But according to his biographer, Douglas-Home, he "did not think that Nationalists' demands for the Territories would be properly fought by any successor, and it was that issue which he saw all along as his main objective in South Africa".¹³⁴ He was "distressed" that he could not answer the accusation in Britain and elsewhere that he and the government "had yielded to the Union on a point of principle". He felt he had acted on principle all along, says Douglas-Home. He had objected to the marriage on principle - the principle that the political consequences would have been disastrous for Seretse's people.

But the problems for Britain in the Protectorate were far from over as many years of non-co-operation from the Bamangwato, as well as violence,¹³⁵ followed. Gordon Walker noted after his tour of southern Africa that the Bamangwato wanted Seretse back and that there was "overwhelming evidence" of Tshekedi's unpopularity. He re-iterated that the government would reconsider the whole issue but only after the five-year period had elapsed.¹³⁶ At the same time, however, he congratulated himself and his government for taking a "firm" attitude on transfer which had "raised the morale of the Territories". He advised that more British money should be spent on them in order to "keep them out" of the Union and noted that the territories could not survive without a "solid block" of British territories behind them.¹³⁷ This, he said, strengthened the argument for closer union and for the proposed Central African Federation.

He argued that it should be possible to keep South African opinion

¹³³ Douglas-Home, The Last Proconsul, p.192.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ See the discussion in Diana Wylie's book, A Little God. The Twilight of Patriarchy in a Southern African Chiefdom (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1991), pp.175-195, concerning the effects of the decision to ban Seretse on the internal politics of the Bamangwato tribe from 1949-56.

¹³⁶ PRO, CAB 129/45, C.P. (51)109, "Visit by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations", 16 April 1951, p.4.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.12.

"divided" on the question of transfer by stressing that it would mean a break with Britain. He was "surprised" at the strength of the opposition in the British press to a speech by Malan in Cape Town on incorporation and said that "we can confidently adopt a policy of indefinitely holding the territories but only if South African opinion continues to be divided".¹³⁸ It was necessary to refrain from acts likely to "inflame public opinion" such as "the recognition of Ruth and Seretse" and he was convinced "we were right in the whole affair".¹³⁹

Churchill's Conservative government came to the same conclusion in November 1951. Despite his statement in parliament in March 1950 describing the Labour government's handling of Seretse as "a disreputable transaction",¹⁴⁰ Churchill endorsed the previous government's White Paper and the decision to exclude both Tshekedi and Seretse from Bechuanaland.¹⁴¹ The new Tory secretary of state, Lord Salisbury, argued for the permanent exclusion of Seretse on the grounds that it would

remove permanently from the Union Government a potentially powerful weapon in its campaign for incorporation of the High Commission Territories and the declaration of a republic.¹⁴²

He noted that this had been the view of General Smuts and "of the present United Party leader in South Africa", that if Seretse were to return all whites would be united in the demand for transfer of the protectorates. The territories would be "defenceless" if South

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.13.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.14.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted by Diana Wylie, A Little God, p.191.

¹⁴¹ CAB 128/23, C.C.(51)11,4, "Bechuanaland Protectorate: Chieftainship of the Bamangwato Tribe", 27 November 1951.

¹⁴² CAB 129/48, C.(51)21, "Bamangwato Affairs", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 19 November 1951.

Africa imposed economic sanctions, he continued, and "we would probably lose the territories".

In March of the following year Salisbury argued the same and noted that "Many African chiefs in the Territories and leading Africans in the Union are opposed to recognition for this reason and because of an innate dislike of miscegenation."¹⁴³ He suggested that Seretse be offered alternative employment in Jamaica.¹⁴⁴ The Cabinet endorsed all of Salisbury's arguments on 27 March 1952 and decided to issue a statement in the House "leaving out reference to South Africa or to outside pressure" and announcing that Seretse could never be recognised and should be "permanently excluded from the Reserve".¹⁴⁵

What should the verdict be on the whole Seretse affair? On at least two counts it should be quite clear that the evidence produced above indicates that: Firstly, Britain sacrificed Seretse as an act of appeasement of South Africa and, secondly, she did this on the assumption that it would keep South Africa in the Commonwealth and out of the protectorates. With hindsight both these assumptions seem to have been seriously flawed in both moral and political terms. The republican movement did not die down because it had a dynamic of its own which was not related to British acts of appeasement and although Strijdom's "extremists" came to accept for strategic reasons that the issue of a republic inside or outside the Commonwealth would be decided separately, it seems hardly likely that the Seretse affair had anything to do with such an acceptance. It had more to do with National Party electoral strategy and considerations of Party unity than any British policy decision.

On moral grounds, even if one accepts that there is a need for a

¹⁴³ CAB 129/50, C.(52)76, "Bamangwato Affairs", 13 March 1952.

¹⁴⁴ CAB 128/24, C.C.31(52)4, "Bechuanaland Protectorate: Chieftainship of the Bamangwato Tribe", 18 March 1952.

¹⁴⁵ C.C.34(52)1, 27 March 1952.

modicum of "Realpolitik" in any nation's diplomatic dealings, the whole episode displayed a more than usual amount of shabbiness and deceit on the part of both British governments. Malan's government, although no less immoral in its motivation, on the other hand, displayed greater consistency and honesty, having made it clear from the beginning that it opposed the marriage. Furthermore, the banning of Seretse did not stop Malan from continuing to demand transfer; demands which were related to domestic political considerations and to considerations of national prestige and which could not have been fundamentally altered or satisfied by a compromise over Seretse. H.B. Thom's biography of D.F. Malan points out how strongly Malan felt about the issue of incorporation, how important it was to him personally to get rid of what he saw as a qualification on the autonomy of the Union and a sign of lack of faith in his government.¹⁴⁶ This was made clear to Gordon Walker at a banquet in his honour in Cape Town in February 1951 when Malan made strong representations for incorporation on the grounds that it affected "our equal status and place among the other members of the Commonwealth as well as our self-respect as a nation".¹⁴⁷

Thom notes that there is a question as to whether Malan fully understood the whole significance and complexity of the incorporation issue in the light of warnings from Attlee, Churchill and his own high commissioner, Geyer, that his attempts were likely to fail.¹⁴⁸ More likely, explains Thom, is Malan's feeling that whatever the outcome he had to raise the issue with Britain because its importance could not be neglected.¹⁴⁹ But perhaps there is another explanation: that Malan genuinely felt he could succeed in his approaches, that Britain was likely to cave in on the question of incorporation as she had on the Seretse issue, and that this could be done by keeping up the pressure. British replies, after

¹⁴⁶ H.B. Thom, D.F. Malan (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980), p.247.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.231.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.245.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

all, were never so uncompromising as to slam the door forever on the possibility of incorporation. They were usually qualified by the words "at the present time" which implied that at some future date it might be possible.

Even Churchill's much quoted "No" to Malan in reply to a question in the House of Commons on 13 April 1953 was qualified in this way. Hyam notes (proudly) that Churchill went beyond the standard reply to this type of parliamentary question on the high commission territories by saying that he hoped the Union would not "needlessly press an issue on which we could not fall in with their views without failing in our trust".¹⁵⁰ He added that there could be "no question" of transfer "at the present time" and hoped that the issue would not affect co-operation between the two countries in the territories and elsewhere. Hyam noted that the Labour opposition "thanked" Churchill for this reply but that African opinion was not mollified and that Tshekedi saw it as "procrastination".¹⁵¹

The Bantu World, while expressing "satisfaction" with Churchill's reply, said that the Union's hands "should be for ever kept off the Protectorates".¹⁵² In parliament, the official opposition under Strauss adopted an ambiguous view, criticising the way Malan had gone about incorporation as "provocative" but affirming that "If there was a real genuine conflict, we would always place South Africa's interests first".¹⁵³ Margaret Ballinger pointed out that South Africa's apartheid policies were "certainly making the African population of the Territories more anxious about the future" and that "the British Government would no doubt negotiate with that as the background".¹⁵⁴ She was certain that the British would "not now" be prepared to negotiate on the basis of the Schedule to the Act (of

¹⁵⁰ R. Hyam, The Failure of South African Expansion, p.191.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Bantu World, 24 April 1954.

¹⁵³ House of Assembly Debates, col.3803, 12 April 1954.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., cols.3850-1, 12 April 1954.

1909) but even she was prepared to consider transfer "If the ...Minister [of native affairs]... can persuade the people of the Protectorates that they would be happier with us than where they are"¹⁵⁵ and she was sure that only on that basis would the British be prepared to negotiate as well.

What is clear, however, is that although the British felt bound by their pledges of consultation of the inhabitants (as they frequently stated), this did not prevent them from holding out the possibility, however tenuous, of some future deal over the territories. As in other areas of concern to the British, such as the question of admitting newly independent African and Asian states to Commonwealth membership (see chapters 6 and 7) or defence and economic issues (chapter 9), the British were determined not to antagonise South Africa's Nationalist government to the point where it may have considered declaring a republic and leaving the Commonwealth at the same time.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., cols.3853-4, 12 April 1954.

Chapter 6: Malan and Africa: the Commonwealth Connection

(a) Mixed signals from Britain

South Africa's Commonwealth relations were affected in a number of ways by Malan's African policy (excluding, for the moment, his policy towards the high commission territories). It placed, once again, some strain upon the relationship with Britain because of the clash of interests concerning the divergent policy aims of the two countries in Africa.¹ Anglo-South African friction in Africa directly affected South Africa's relations with her main Commonwealth partner and indirectly her relations with other Commonwealth countries interested in the decolonisation process. For example, it contributed to the worsening relationship between India and South Africa because of India's position as the leader of newly emerging nations in Africa and Asia and because of South African perceptions of what were seen as Indian designs in Africa.

In the African region there were, however, also complementary and co-operative features of the relationship between South Africa and Western colonial powers, Britain in particular, that could be regarded as contributing to a strengthening (in the short term, at least) of the Commonwealth connection. Co-operation in the technical and agricultural spheres was welcomed by colonial powers and, initially at least, Malan's overtures in the direction of an African Charter and an African defence system for the continent were not dismissed out of hand. After all, Britain, even under the Labour government, was as concerned as South Africa was about the perceived communist threat to Africa and the Middle East and was keen to enlist South Africa's help in both areas. The Te Water mission to Africa in 1949 demonstrated this clearly, despite some hesitancy on the part of the Labour government.² Malan had sent Te Water northwards in order to get his idea of an African defence pact off

¹ Colin Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid 1945-63" (D.Phil Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1992), p.299.

² Ibid., pp.318-9.

the ground and had achieved a favourable response in African colonies and a mixed response in London (talks with officials there revealed some alarm at Malan's intentions and a preference to discuss technical rather than political co-operation). Only when it had become clear to Britain and the other colonial powers that South Africa's racial policies and the conditions placed by her on defence co-operation in Africa had become insurmountable problems was the door to such co-operation eventually closed. But that only happened in the mid-fifties, during the Strijdom era.

On the domestic front Malan's African policy did not arouse much hostile comment from the main white opposition party because it was not seen (except by a handful of far-sighted MPs) as threatening to South Africa's foreign relations in general or to her Commonwealth relations in particular. The UP was right behind Malan in his attempts to achieve an anti-communist and anti-African nationalist alliance with the colonial powers and tried to highlight the whole issue as an example of how indispensable Britain and the Commonwealth were to South Africa's interests in Africa. This approach was not followed by the black opposition, however, which bitterly accused Malan of attempting to hold up the process of decolonisation and of trying to form an alliance with settler regimes to the north. The ANC and other organisations viewed with suspicion any moves to include South Africa in a pan-African defence system and urged Britain not to be held hostage by Malan or by white settlers in the African colonies as she moved towards decolonisation in Africa.³

Various commentators have pointed out how Malan's government tended to assume in the early 1950's that colonial rule to the north was there to stay for the indefinite future. They also point out that much of the disappointment, frustration and tension from the South African side emanated from this central misconception. Colin Vale,

³ WCL,AD 2186 (ANC), Ba 3 (Annual Report of the National Executive Committee to the 42nd Annual Congress of the ANC, Durban, 19-19 December 1954,) Part 2 "International Situation", p.6.

for example, has shown how both Smuts and Malan misread the mixed signals coming from policy makers in the British Labour government concerning decolonisation in Africa. They were unable to "comprehend" the "revolution" in colonial policy which occurred after 1945 under the direction of Arthur Creech-Jones, secretary of state for the colonies, and Andrew Cohen in the colonial office.⁴ They "simply did not know what was going on in the Colonial Office" and "could not have believed" that, "in their view, such recklessness and irresponsibility" (the policy of rapid movement to self-government) was possible from Britain. They had taken comfort from what seemed to be a policy of continuity (because the colonial office was essentially "passive and reactive") and from statements like that of Sir Philip Mitchell, Governor of Kenya, who said he could not see Africans ruling themselves in the "foreseeable future".⁵

J.D.B. Miller notes that the problem was that of a lack of "a wider vision" by British policy-makers who had to keep on good terms with South Africa after 1948 and also with vocal white minorities in Kenya and Tanganyika.⁶ It was aggravated, said Miller, by the fragmentary character of British departmental activity: the colonial office, the Commonwealth relations office (for relations with Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and the protectorates) and the foreign office for UNO diplomacy and Sudan's move to independence.⁷ So, departmental fragmentation together with the differing approaches of the right and left wings of both Labour and Conservative Parties as well as the belief that there was still "infinite time" (which Sir Andrew Cohen found typical of British colonial policy immediately after World War II), all meant that the "wider vision" was missing from the British side.

⁴ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.302-314.

⁵ Ibid., p.312.

⁶ Miller, Survey, p.105.

⁷ Ibid., p.106.

This could only have contributed to the misunderstandings from the South African side. It was not, however, purely a case of feeling "let down" or "bamboozled" by the British that led Malan to vociferous criticism of the British policy in Africa. It was active dislike of and apprehension at the consequences of British policy that motivated him to speak out so strongly in parliament and elsewhere against that policy. The hope must have been there of influencing Britain to abandon the plan for self-government in the Gold Coast and elsewhere if South Africa's opposition could be stated strongly enough.

(b) Malan's African Charter, Britain and decolonisation, 1948-54

Malan's "African Charter" provided the sort of answer which, in contrast to British policy, would, in the Nationalist view, ensure the survival of the "White Man" in Africa. In a policy statement in the House of Assembly on 1 September 1948 Malan had explained his African policy fully.⁸ He had suggested that all European countries which had interests in Africa, including the United States (which had interests in Liberia), should get together and form a common Africa policy. For the African territories south of the Sahara the Government's intention was to give "the fullest co-operation in all conferences on research into problems affecting Africa as a whole and the Union in particular". Like Pan-Americanism in the Americas the question now arose whether it was necessary to create a "Pan-African Charter". Peoples of Africa "who had not advanced far along the road of development" had to be led in the direction of "Christian civilisation".

Africa would have to be held for the people of Africa and protected against the "grave danger of Asiatic penetration". There were parts of Africa - Kenya in particular - where the European population was alarmed about the open door policy to Asiatics and particularly Indian penetration. His Charter envisaged protection of Africa

⁸ TA, A78 (Te Water), Vol.4, File AE 2/1 (Union External Policy: General 1948 Sept. - March 1949), News Bulletin No.65, State Information Office, 2 September 1948.

against this "threat". There was also the problem of the "militarisation" of the African people. It was of "great concern" to the Union and it was South Africa's duty to protect the people of Africa from that danger.⁹ (In the light of later speeches on the topic of "militarisation" it seems that Malan was here criticising the colonial powers for arming Africans during the war and after).

This African Charter idea of Malans was not new and had been outlined by him in the House in 1945 when he was leader of the opposition.¹⁰ It was originally, as Barber and Barratt note, almost an "off-the-cuff" idea¹¹ and was developed as a response to Smuts's federation scheme for colonies to the north. As Vale notes, it was not so much a plan to extend apartheid to the north as some critics claimed, but was more of a "foreign policy" for Africa.¹² It was a sort of Truman Doctrine for Africa aimed primarily at combating communism and "Asiatic penetration", the latter being something of an obsession for the Nationalists in the early 1950's and which earned them considerable support from the English-speaking opposition. It was also designed to enlist the help of the colonial powers against the spread of African nationalism, the effects of which would be felt in South Africa itself.

All these aspects of Malan's Charter are apparent in the correspondence between Te Water and Malan during the former's tour of Africa in 1949. The Te Water mission to Africa in 1949 had been designed as an attempt to promote Malan's African Charter and to obtain support for defence and technical co-operation with the colonies to the north.¹³ While he was in Northern Rhodesia Te Water

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.36.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.316.

¹³ See Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.318-9 and G.R. Berridge, South Africa, the Colonial Powers and 'African Defence'. The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, 1948-60 (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp.15-23, for a fuller

described the mission as "a gesture of good neighbourliness"¹⁴ and claimed that expressions of "warm appreciation" were received from officials concerning the Union's technical assistance. He had tested "responsible opinion" on political questions such as "Communist and Asiatic penetration" and had received "understanding and approval". Roy Welensky, the leader of the unofficial members of the Northern Rhodesian legislative council, had telegraphed him and had "violently reiterated" the resistance of "every Northern Rhodesian" to the policy of native paramountcy¹⁵ (which the British colonial secretary had just re-affirmed in the so-called "Creech-Jones Statement").

Welensky had asked Te Water what the Union was going to do about what he called "a policy which would end by the practical establishment on [the Union's] Northern borders of a black communistic state?". To whom, he had asked, could they look for guidance and assistance but the Union? Te Water noted in response to this that "the turning South at a moment of peril seemed instinctive" and that this gave him "hope for the conception of a Southern African hegemony".

In Britain earlier Te Water had found "extreme interest" from Attlee in his proposals on common native policies, communist and Asian penetration, soil conservation programmes, etc.¹⁶ The British foreign secretary, Bevin, had expressed a "real understanding of his African thesis" and seemed "conscious of ...the problem of Asiatic overpopulation, and the political dangers which were latent in that biological phenomenon".¹⁷

discussion of the aims and motives behind the Te Water mission.

¹⁴ A 78, Vol.2, File AE 1/2/2 (Reports to Prime Minister, 1948 September - 1962 March), te Water - Malan, 12 May 1949.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁶ A 78, Vol.2, File AE 1/2/2, Te Water - Malan, 16 February 1949, p.1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

In July, however, when he described the last phase of his "African and Mediterranean journey" to Malan he was not as sanguine about the British response.¹⁸ He noted that he had last spoken to Bevin in February about an African defence pact, Asiatic penetration, militarisation of the natives, differing native policies and soil conservation and that since then Malan himself had discussed African policies with Whitehall.

Te Water had found Bevin then "receptive" and "converted to the idea of a concerted organic policy" for Africa.¹⁹ But after talks with Creech-Jones, William Strang (the permanent head of the foreign office) and Andrew Cohen (head of the department of colonial affairs) he was told that an attempt in the circumstances of such divergent opinions and practice in African policies to find common agreement through the instrument of an "African Conference" would be "impolitic, unwise and foredoomed to failure".²⁰ This, he said, was confirmed in talks with Philip Noel-Baker.

What had become increasingly clear from the British response to Te Water's proposals concerning Africa was that co-operation at a political and military level was less welcome than technical and economic co-operation. Te Water himself realised the need to tread softly with Britain and he hoped that from issues such as soil conservation South Africa could later move to

those delicate questions on which it would be the height of folly immediately to attempt [an] approach or agreement - the native policies of the continent of Africa, the intrusion of Asia into Africa and the place of the African continent in the pattern of a world divided into East and West.²¹

¹⁸ File AE 1/2/2, Te Water - Malan, 12 July 1949.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

²⁰ Ibid., p.3.

²¹ File AE 1/2/2, Te Water - Malan, 16 February 1949, p.2.

At home Malan's Africa policy was receiving a mixed reaction. In parliament it was generally welcomed by both sides of the House. M. Kentridge (UP, Troyeville) in 1948 congratulated Malan for sending Te Water on his first mission and claimed that Britain was on South Africa's side in trying to prevent "UNO interference in South African affairs and in the Empire".²² He expressed the hope that Malan would ensure South Africa's co-operation with the "three great colonial empires" to the north. Nationalist speakers like M. de Wet Nel (NP, Wonderboom) urged the government to "give a lead" on African affairs in the North especially in view of what were called "attempts to build up a new empire in Africa" by Britain and attempts to create a "non-European army".²³

In April 1950 the Rand Daily Mail applauded Southern Rhodesian "native policy" for being similar to that of the Union and claimed that "only tinpot societies and cranks" continued to support the traditional British policies in that regard.²⁴ But the opposition member for Yeoville, Dr H. Gluckman, struck a different note in parliament when he expressed concern that South Africa was "missing the bus in Africa" while new developments were occurring to the north (federation plans).²⁵ He asked for a fuller statement from Malan on the results of the Te Water mission to Africa and wanted to know what the repercussions of "developments to the North" would be on South Africa.

Some sections of black opinion expressed an unreserved aversion to Malan's Africa policy. The Non-European Unity Movement, for example, stated in 1951 that Malan's government had "earned the hatred of the masses in Africa" for casting "covetous eyes" on Rhodesia and the protectorates and for condemning the "liberal policies of the Imperialist powers who are conceding power as a result of the

²² House of Assembly Debates, cols 1303-4, 31 August 1948.

²³ Ibid., col.1311, 31 August 1948.

²⁴ Rand Daily Mail, 11 April 1950.

²⁵ House of Assembly Debates, col.4218-19, 13 April 1950.

militancy of the masses".²⁶

Even stronger was the condemnation of Malan's "Pan-African Alliance" from the ranks of the West African press. Te Water enclosed a copy of an editorial in the weekly newspaper West Africa for Malan's attention in September 1948, soon after Malan's speech in parliament on his African Charter. The paper stated that Malan's idea should be "challenged in the interests of human decency, economic sanity and the future of the British Empire".²⁷ It would not be challenged in South Africa because "all white parties were united in favour of white rule and the ...enslavement of 9 million Blacks within their own homeland". Only "Whitehall" could challenge Malan, said the editorial, and should do so "without delay" because of the danger to the welfare of Africa and the "continuity of the British Empire".

British policy and thought was already moving in a radically different direction to that envisaged by Te Water and Malan. By 1950 Gold Coast was on the verge of receiving responsible government and was becoming the test case of the Labour government's post-war decolonisation scheme. Malan had already expressed unease over the accession of new members to the Commonwealth in his post-election broadcast on 4 June 1948.²⁸ Duncan-Hall notes that in 1951, with the imminent prospect of Gold Coast membership after the elections there, he was to complain of a "preposterous absurdity in Commonwealth relations".²⁹ He had complained then and later that the United Kingdom acted on its own in adding new members to the Commonwealth and that this was a process which was changing the nature of the group.

In reporting the speech by Malan on decolonisation in February 1951, Round Table noted that Malan had accused Britain of "killing the

²⁶ Quoted in Karis, Hope and Challenge, p.504.

²⁷ West Africa, 11 September 1948.

²⁸ See Chapter 4, p.71.

²⁹ Quoted in H. Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth, p.768.

Commonwealth" by letting in new members without consulting the others.³⁰ Now the latest "outburst", which was apparently caused by the victory of Nkrumah's PLP Party in the Gold Coast elections, had resulted in Malan predicting that white leadership would be at an end in Africa and that there would be an elimination of British influence in Africa.³¹ He had criticised the British colonial secretary for saying that the Gold Coast would be welcomed as a member of the Commonwealth in advance as would all other colonies. Malan asked how Britain could allow her colonies to get Commonwealth membership without consulting the others.³² Round Table saw this speech as an advance notice of Malan's future attitude to decolonisation in Africa:

In so far as Dr Malan intends his utterance as a threat of the Union's future attitude, therefore, it is a warning that Britain and other members may have to choose between a uni-racial Commonwealth with South Africa as a member and a multi-racial Commonwealth without her.³³

The article went on to query whether Malan was using the issue "as a trump card against his political opponents" (by taking the wind out of the sails of the UP) and whether he was now claiming to have a veto over British colonial policy.³⁴

In the parliamentary debate on the issue in May 1951 Malan said that unless the interests of South Africa were "deeply affected" he did not normally interfere in matters "between England and her own colonies".³⁵ But the British minister for the colonies had

³⁰ "Dr Malan and the Commonwealth - Britain and her dependencies", Round Table, Vol.41, 1950-51, p.219.

³¹ Ibid., pp.219-220.

³² Ibid., p.221.

³³ Ibid., p.223.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.223-226.

³⁵ House of Assembly Debates, col.6787, 16 May 1951.

expressed the hope in his speech welcoming the results of the elections in Gold Coast that the territory would get "dominion status in the full sense of the word". This would mean that Gold Coast would enter the UNO and "it would not remain at that...The next one would be the British West Indian Islands". The colonial secretary had said that Britain's whole colonial empire should become members of the United Nations and this affected South Africa: "We are a member of the United Nations and as such we are affected and as such we have the right immediately to react because it affects our country."³⁶

That was why he had made himself heard, he said, and why he had decided "to object from the point of view of our country, in the interest of the United Nations themselves and also in the interest of Great Britain herself". Britain's policy would lead to the "disappearance of the white man from the greater part of Africa".³⁷ But England, was "indispensable as a civilising influence" in Africa. Her leadership and guardianship could not, in the interests of the natives themselves, be spared.³⁸ It was a "wrong step", he said, "to grant self-government to the Gold Coast". The territory's overpopulation and illiteracy would have the result that "it would sink into barbarism or alternatively become a dictatorship".³⁹ He claimed to have no objection to self-government for such territories but that it should only happen when they had "reached such a level of civilisation and sense of responsibility that they [were] ripe for it".⁴⁰

Malan went on to say that his government's policy in respect of the native territories inside South Africa was identical - gradual self-

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., col.6819, 16 May 1951.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., col.6820, 16 May 1951.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

government in their own areas.⁴¹ In answer to a question from the opposition leader, J.G.N. Strauss, as to whether he had consulted Britain before making his statement on the Gold Coast, he said "it was not for him to interfere" but that the British statement meant UNO membership would follow and he had an interest in the UNO not being changed "through new members being allowed to come in without the United Nations having any say".⁴²

In March, Geyer, the South African high commissioner in London, had written to Malan regretting that the latter had not stated his position on what had happened in West Africa in a more "wide-ranging" way ("nie breedvoeriger gestel het nie").⁴³ Since public opinion in Britain was such that it was felt South Africa was "out to suppress the Blacks", it would have been better to make it clear that his argument was that West Africa "was completely unready for self-government" ("nog gans en al onryp is vir selfbestuur").⁴⁴ But now with all the "prejudice" which existed in Britain the left-wing reaction would be to say that Malan would never favour self-government for West Africa, whatever its stage of development. The Tories "were just as worried as us" about the "foolish policy" ("dwase beleid") in West Africa but they agreed, "of course", that the colonies should eventually get self-government.

Geyer added that he had had to "watch his words" when speaking to the Royal Empire Society about the same question because he was "not allowed to say anything in criticism of the government" in Britain.⁴⁵ However, he had been thanked by the acting Commonwealth secretary and "judging by the Hear, Hears!" he felt that many of those present had come to "their own conclusions". In his speech to

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., col.6821, 16 May 1951.

⁴³ CA, A1890 (Geyer Collection), Vol.1, Geyer - Malan, 5 March 1951.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the Royal Empire Society he had laid emphasis on what he called "our conviction that Black Africa would still for generations to come be ruled by European powers, in the interests as much of Africa as of Europe".⁴⁶

In May, just before the parliamentary debate quoted above, Geyer told Malan that the admittance of the three Asian members of the Commonwealth had changed its character "more than what the British liked to admit".⁴⁷ India did not co-operate as much (as was well-known, he said) and the consequence was that the high commissioners were "hardly ever called together". The Indian high commissioner in London (Krishna Menon) "hated the West" and "could not be trusted" ("is allermins te vertrou").⁴⁸

What all these letters and speeches indicate is how adversely the South African government viewed the new British moves towards decolonisation, and how keen the government was to seek reassurance that the policy was just a temporary aberration and that British policy-makers were basically sympathetic to the South African view of self-government for African colonies. The Labour government, before it left office in November 1951, did not have much time to deal with Malan's explosively hostile reaction to self-government in the Gold Coast but it is clear that Gordon Walker's memorandum on his visit to southern Africa must have been influenced by Malan's speech. In that memorandum, drawn up in April, Gordon Walker argued strongly for a policy of closer union in Central Africa because, as he put it, "our whole work in Africa would be undone if Britain "intentionally or by default" threw the British communities of East and Central Africa "into the arms of the Union".⁴⁹ The Union's "detested policies" would spread far to the north, to the "heart" of Britain's colonial empire and "millions of Africans" would be

⁴⁶ Geyer - Malan, 21 February 1951.

⁴⁷ Geyer - Malan, 15 May 1951.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ PRO, CAB 129/45, C.P.51(109), "Visit by Secretary of State", 16 April 1951, p.10.

subject to "oppression and terrible wars".⁵⁰

The Labour government already suspected that Malan harboured designs on the Rhodesias and on the protectorates and so the argument for a Central African Federation was essentially that it would strengthen British influence in the area and keep South Africa out. Geyer was aware of this reason and had objected strongly to Gordon Walker about it. As he put it, South Africa was the "gogga" against which the Central African Federation was designed.⁵¹

The new Conservative government's response to Malan's anti-decolonisation attitude was typically cautious. Officials such as Liesching in the CRO said in 1952 (in reply to colonial office concerns) that when Malan criticised British policy he usually did so on matters "that are legitimately the concern of South Africa, for example, the Gold Coast's membership of the Commonwealth".⁵² Liesching advised against making any sort of public statement on British moves to abolish existing discrimination in the colonies as "this could stiffen European opinion in South Africa"⁵³ and he also agreed with Lloyd of the colonial office that they should avoid, as Lloyd had put it, "anything more than a passing reference" to the general policy of helping colonies to attain self-government.⁵⁴

In fact, the Conservative government's colonial policies in Africa tended to proceed with one eye on Malan and another on the colonies themselves. In February 1952, for instance, Churchill's new cabinet met to consider an amendment to the constitution of the Gold Coast which would "give an appearance of greater authority to the leader

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.11.

⁵¹ CA, A1890, Vol.1, Geyer - Malan, 20 August 1951

⁵² PRO, DO 35, File 2220, No.3, Liesching - LLOYD, 15 September 1952.

⁵³ Ibid., No.5, Liesching - Lloyd, 25 October 1952.

⁵⁴ Ibid., No.4, Lloyd - Liesching, 13 October 1952.

of the Government party in the Legislature".⁵⁵ In discussion the colonial secretary noted that it was his predecessor, Griffiths, who had given these pledges and that they were not necessarily "disadvantageous". However, the Commonwealth secretary, Lord Ismay, noted that "these changes might excite some alarm in South Africa" and he requested some time to explain them to the Union government before any announcement was made.

Similarly, in November 1952, in regard to the independence of the Sudan, the fear was expressed that South Africa would oppose any moves towards Sudanese membership of the Commonwealth (as would Australia, New Zealand and Canada), on the grounds that an increase in Commonwealth numbers would "weaken the coherence of the organisation".⁵⁶ The Commonwealth secretary submitted a memorandum to the cabinet which stated that the Sudan was not suitable for Commonwealth membership for a variety of reasons, one of them being that

she could not be admitted without prior consultation with all existing Members, of whom South Africa, at any rate under her present government would certainly not agree.⁵⁷

In 1953 a revealing conversation took place between Malan and the new Commonwealth secretary, Lord Swinton, in which Malan again expressed his concerns about British decolonisation moves. In a memorandum to the British cabinet Swinton summarised his discussions with Malan and noted that the latter had wanted to talk about what he (Malan) called the "African Problem".⁵⁸ He had asked Swinton

⁵⁵ PRO, CAB 128/24, C.C.16(52)6, "Gold Coast: Amendment of the Constitution", 12 February 1952.

⁵⁶ CAB 128/25, C.C.93(52)4, "Sudan", 6 November 1952.

⁵⁷ CAB 129/57, C.(52)452, "Membership of the Commonwealth: the Sudan", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 23 December 1952.

⁵⁸ CAB 129/61, C.(53)165, "Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 5 June 1953.

whether Africans would dominate in the colonies and whether this would affect southern Africa as well. Swinton had replied that there were differences between West and Central Africa and that West Africa "was not a White Man's country" whereas Rhodesia "was just as much white as well as black".⁵⁹

Malan had asked him whether Britain was going ahead with the Central African Federation and he had replied that he was. Malan then expressed worries about certain Africans who "wanted domination" and referred to newspaper reports of Nkrumah wanting a Pan-African conference. Swinton replied that this was "unlikely" and that Malan should not accept what the papers said uncritically and that Nkrumah was "too busy" in the Gold Coast and had too many differences with Nigeria etc., to worry about such a conference. Malan then expressed the need for more information on Britain's African policies in the colonies, information such as that which he received on defence, trade, the foreign office, etc. Swinton had agreed and had spoken with Lyttleton, the colonial secretary, who had also agreed.

Malan had then spoken of the need for Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal to have conferences to discuss matters in Africa and had mentioned "his rather alarming idea" of an "African Charter". Swinton felt it was "not a good idea" to discuss the treatment of Africans but rather general defence measures, etc., with off-the-record discussions of other things as well. (Malan then chuckled and said, "You English are very illogical, but you have a lot of common sense.") He then spoke of UNO interference in South Africa and Swinton emphasized support for the non-interference rule. He talked of Nehru's designs in Africa "which went far beyond any proper discussion of the position of Indians in his territories or ours". He claimed that Nehru aimed at "dumping" surplus Indians in South Africa, that Nehru was setting himself up as the champion of Africans and was attempting to create an Indian empire in Africa but had been beaten to the post by Mao Tse Tung.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

The above conversation is revealing as an indication of the thinking of both Malan and the British on the decolonisation issue, with Malan still suspicious of British motives and obsessed by the Indian threat to Africa. The British, on the other hand, were adopting a mollifying role, trying to set Malan's mind at rest by assuring him of continued white rule in Central Africa (which is what the proposed Federation essentially amounted to) and promising him continued support at the UNO. The door would still be open to defence and technical co-operation in Africa although aspects of Malan's Charter were clearly not acceptable because of racial considerations. Malan could only have gone away with the impression that South Africa could rely on a British-created buffer in Central Africa to ward off the tide of advancing black nationalism and that British support for South Africa at the UNO would continue indefinitely.

In July 1953 Malan was reported as saying (in a welcoming speech to Robert Menzies, the Australian prime minister who was visiting South Africa) that he wanted to see Britain, with her "stabilising and civilising influence", remain in Africa together with the French, Belgians and Portuguese.⁶¹ In parliament he rejected Strauss's proposal of the idea of an "inner and outer" circle of Commonwealth membership (for old and new members respectively). He said that those in the "outer" would not be satisfied to stay "in the kitchen", as he put it, instead of in the "living room" and that in any case it would mean racial discrimination.⁶² Echoing Smuts, he said that without a common outlook the Commonwealth was doomed and thus he had protested to the Labour government when it gave the Gold Coast its "strange" constitution. But now he had been assured by the new British government that no new members would join without the agreement of all the others.

In May of the following year in parliament he was so fulsome in his praise of the British role in Africa that The Star called him "the

⁶¹ Rand Daily Mail, 10 July 1953.

⁶² Rand Daily Mail, 8 July 1953.

last of the imperialists" and commended him for opposing "a hasty transfer of power to those who could only retard their own and Africa's development".⁶³ The only proviso, as The Star noted in the same report, was that South Africa should not "embarrass" the imperial powers in Africa by her "domestic affairs".

Clearly, then, by the time he left power in October 1954, Malan had not come to accept the inevitability of the decolonisation process (in Central Africa at least) and was not by any means reconciled to the idea of South Africa having to accept independent African dominions such as the Gold Coast within the Commonwealth. However, his high commissioner in London had given him notice of exactly that eventuality in the future. Geyer had written to him in October 1953 to say that according to a source of his at the University of Accra in the Gold Coast, although the territory would "still for a long time need the help of senior white officials", Nkrumah had himself developed a "surprisingly strong sense of responsibility since he came to power" ("n' verrassende sterk verantwoordelikeidsin ontwikkel het").⁶⁴

Geyer had been told that Nkrumah was determined to seek Commonwealth membership as an independent state and that he would not be satisfied with a "two level" Commonwealth membership (which was an idea being mooted in Britain at the time). Nkrumah was sure, he said, that South Africa would be the only state to oppose this but he felt sure India would give him strong support and that "it would be impossible for Britain to choose South Africa's side against India and the Gold Coast". The source had warned Geyer that all hostile ministerial statements from the Union were widely reported in Gold Coast and would "achieve nothing" (which amused Geyer who saw parallels with what happened in the British press in regard to South Africa).⁶⁵

⁶³ The Star, 4 May 1954.

⁶⁴ CA, A1890, Vol.1., Geyer - Malan, 13 October 1953.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The black press in South Africa in general took exactly the opposite attitude to decolonisation that the government and UP opposition had taken. Ilanga Lase Natal, for example, said in 1953 that all "right thinking Europeans" should be glad that the empire of Britain had

metamorphosed into this new flowering [Commonwealth] without it sharing the fate of the empires of Babylon, Athens and Rome and other great empires or Powers that through their rigidity, stubbornness and failure to adapt themselves to changing conditions and developments perished....Far from criticising Britain for her so-called "liberal" policies and her so-called abdication in Africa, the Union should admire and follow Britain in her wisdom of bowing to or anticipating the inevitable.⁶⁶

The Bantu World in an editorial of April the following year criticised Malan for saying in an interview with an American newspaper that much of the unrest in Africa apart from the Communist Party agitation came from the British policy of granting self-rule to the Gold Coast Africans.⁶⁷ He had reportedly said that democracy was a "good thing" but that people had to be educated for it. The Bantu World, on the other hand, argued that "democracy was its own school" and that self-rule in Gold Coast was an "excellent thing" even if it encouraged unrest, which, it said, was in any case a "symptom of a problem". Africans, it concluded, "see in the self-government of the Gold Coast the fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations".

In the same issue a message to the people of South Africa from Dr Nkrumah was printed. Nkrumah thanked the editor for asking him to send the message and said, "we are making great strides towards achieving independence within the Commonwealth ...and...we are conscious of our task to the rest of the African continent".⁶⁸ He

⁶⁶ Ilanga Lase Natal, 25 April 1953.

⁶⁷ Bantu World, 24 April 1954.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

noted with "great pleasure and interest" the proposal to have a steamship link between Gold Coast and South Africa and said, "there would be a valuable opportunity [through trade] for increased understanding which can assist our peoples in the improvement of their living standards and...political progress".

As we shall see, this optimistic prospect of future relations between an independent Ghana and South Africa would soon prove to be premature.

Chapter 7: Malan and the Declaration of London: Constitutional Issues

(a) The Irish precedent

Before 1949 the achievement of a republic and the rejection of the Commonwealth connection had been logically connected in the minds of most Afrikaner nationalists. After 1949 this was no longer the case. The reason, of course, was the decision, agreed to by all member states at the April 1949 Commonwealth conference, to allow India and Pakistan into the Commonwealth as republics. No longer did the ideological and legal reasons for the Nationalist aim of secession coincide.¹ The ideological argument had been based on the notion that the attainment of a republic meant the defeat of British imperialism which had triumphed over the Boer republics in 1902. The British monarchy had symbolised the humiliation of that defeat. The legal argument had centred on the indivisibility of the crown and the feeling in Nationalist circles that the Statute of Westminster had not dispelled the notion of a legal clash between the republican ideal and allegiance to the monarchy.² As Miller has noted, the Nationalists feared that anti-Nationalists might still "fall back, as a last resort, upon Britain".³ These were arguments that derived from the 1920's and 1930's and that were aggravated by Smuts's stance on the outbreak of World War II.⁴

After the war, however, it was Ireland which became the precedent for republicanism within the Commonwealth, even though the Irish chose not to remain after becoming a republic.⁵ General J.B.M. Hertzog had brought the matter forward as early as 1937 at the imperial conference of that year when Ireland had decided to adopt

¹ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.378.

² Miller, Survey, p.127.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Mansergh, The Commonwealth Experience, p.321.

republican status "in all but name".⁶ Hertzog insisted then that there should be no decision to lay down conditions for Ireland's continued membership of the Commonwealth and that formula was not subsequently departed from. In 1948, when Ireland decided to become a republic and leave the Commonwealth at the same time, there was no Commonwealth consultation nor even advance knowledge (except, perhaps, for Canada).⁷ But, as Mansergh notes, there were two ways in which a Commonwealth role took effect.⁸ Firstly, the old dominions expressed consensus that Irish withdrawal should not damage relations with Eire. Secondly, they decided that the only difference was that now Ireland no longer attended prime ministers' meetings. This meant, according to Mansergh, that "a distinctive Irish/European voice was lost on many Commonwealth issues"⁹ (such as Suez, Rhodesia, South Africa's decision to become a republic, etc), but twenty years later the decision was in a sense justified because there were more republics than monarchies in the Commonwealth.

Malan's government approved of but did not take part in the decisions of October 1948 on Ireland and no doubt agreed wholeheartedly with the settlement reached there. After all, it meant that South Africa might follow the same path later on without the danger of losing her important trade and other links with the Commonwealth. As J.D.B. Miller has noted, dominion pressure had ensured that Ireland had received "special treatment" - that trade preferences should continue and that the Irish should not be alien citizens and should not lose their privileges in Britain that were previously held.¹⁰ Malan warmly welcomed Ireland's independence with the words:

South Africa is gratified that the relations of the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p.322.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ J.D.B. Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.147.

Republic of Ireland with the Union as with other member states of the Commonwealth, will be characterised by special ties of understanding, friendship and goodwill which cannot but prove beneficial amidst the difficulties and complexities of today's international problems. ¹¹

If Ireland could remain intimately linked to the Commonwealth despite becoming a republic the way forward for a South African republic seemed that much easier.

The October 1948 prime ministers' conference (which Eric Louw attended on Malan's behalf) adopted certain measures which made Commonwealth membership even more congenial to the Nationalist government. It was agreed upon, for example, to change the status of the high commissioners who would now rank with foreign ambassadors and would no longer have precedence over ambassadors in state functions.¹² Order of precedence for high commissioners would now be decided according to date of appointment and not according to seniority of countries (Canada having been seen as the "most senior" in the past). The conference also agreed to change the term "British Commonwealth" to "Commonwealth of Nations", the latter term having been used by South Africa and Ireland since before the war.¹³ (Similarly, the Empire Parliamentary Association changed its name to Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at its 1948 biennial conference).

All these changes were referred to approvingly by Malan in a speech in Port Elizabeth on 26 October 1948. The new status of the high commissioners confirmed that South Africa had reached its "full status of freedom and independence" he said, and it would give Union

¹¹ Commonwealth Survey, Jan.- Dec. 1950, Part 1, 1a (Constitutional), "Malan's Statement of Good Wishes to Ireland on becoming a Republic", 30 April 1949.

¹² TA, A78 (Te Water), Vol.4, File AE 2/1/1 (Union External Policy, General) , External Affairs Policy Review No. 15, November 1948, p.2.

¹³ Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth, p.644.

representatives abroad an equal footing with ambassadors representing other countries.¹⁴ Noting that the recent prime minister's conference had dropped the term "British" from "British Commonwealth", he said that what used to be the British Empire when the Nationalist Party came into being had through peaceful evolution become the Commonwealth and even the terms Dominion and British Subject "were no longer used". He emphasised that belonging to the "family circle" did not mean a loss of independence and hoped that English and Afrikaans would unite as never before if a war "against Communism" took place.

Malan noted further that South Africa had only two high commissioners at that time (Lief Egeland in London and Dr R.P. Viljoen in Ottawa) but none in any other Commonwealth capital. However, Australia and South Africa were likely to exchange high commissioners soon and new "important diplomatic appointments" were also soon to be announced.¹⁵ He also stressed that the "King of South Africa" was separate from the king of New Zealand, etc., and

¹⁴ Cape Times, 26 October 1948. It is worth noting that Te Water and Eric Louw had an even more radical view of the status of high commissioner than what was agreed to at the conference. Te Water wrote to Malan in September saying that he and Louw felt that the "right status" for the high commissioner in London was that instead of reporting to the dominions office he should be made an "ambassador" with relations direct to the foreign office "...according to the now accepted principle of the division of the Crown". (A78, Vol.2, File AE 1/2/2 (Reports to PM 1948 Sept. -1962 March), Te Water - Malan, 8 September 1948, pp.1-2).

¹⁵ Ibid. Deon Geldenhuys has noted that although the NP government embarked on a programme of expanding South Africa's representation overseas after 1948, in proportional terms the diplomatic network actually contracted if the growth in the number of missions was set against the increase in the number of states in that period. This, claims Geldenhuys, reflected South Africa's "growing international isolation". He also noted that London remained pre-eminent in importance as South Africa's diplomatic capital and that in 1950 Malan ruled that the high commissioner's office there should become a "de jure" institution of the department of external affairs responsible for handling "all political matters between Britain, South Africa and international issues involving both". (Deon Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation. South African Foreign Policy Making, South African Institute of International Affairs (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1984), p.14.

that the prime ministers' conference had announced that there were different and "equal" centres of the Commonwealth, not just London. Ireland was likely to become a "full republic soon or draw nearer to the Commonwealth" as a result of "new developments" and Britain was now "as dependent" upon the dominions as they were upon it.

This speech was criticised by one opposition newspaper more for "what was not said" than for what was said.¹⁶ There was no guarantee that "tomorrow he [Malan], or his party, will not agitate for what they will be pleased to describe as a movement to liberate South Africa from the bands of British imperialism", claimed an editorial in The Friend of Bloemfontein. Republicanism still remained on the programme of Malan's party and Malan could "choose his own time and place, as political needs and tactics demand it, to fling the issue into the party arena". The Nationalists had "failed to reveal any real understanding" of the fact that Commonwealth membership "entailed wider obligations, not just national interests", it was argued.

But what is clear, wider obligations or not, is that Malan and his party were beginning to find that the Commonwealth was becoming a more congenial organisation for a National Party government to belong to. As long as there was no interference in South Africa's affairs, Malan often said, and as long as South Africa's freedom and independence were guaranteed then Commonwealth membership was acceptable. Most important was the desire for Afrikaner nationalist republican sentiments to be accommodated constitutionally. If that could be achieved then only the "extremist" republicans in the party, led by J.G.Strijdom, would still not accept Commonwealth membership.

The clash within the Nationalist party over the Commonwealth was only resolved in 1951 when Malan and Strijdom agreed to disagree over the issue and to accept that a republic and Commonwealth membership would be treated separately. At caucus meetings in March

¹⁶ The Friend, 27 October 1948.

1951 Malan argued that a republic outside the Commonwealth would be seen as "anti-British" and that therefore there would be less support for it.¹⁷ There would have to be a good reason for leaving the Commonwealth, he argued then, otherwise South Africa would end up being isolated. Strijdom had attacked him for not leaving the Commonwealth immediately and for not sticking to Nationalist policy which had always been that of breaking with Britain. They ended up agreeing that the republic and Commonwealth membership were separate issues to be decided separately when the time came to decide on them.¹⁸

(b) Malan and the Declaration of London, April 1949

As one commentator has noted, the post-war developments towards a looser form of Commonwealth were favouring Malan's republican aims to an increasing extent.¹⁹ It was the Commonwealth prime ministers' conference of April 1949 which provided the watershed in the development of the Commonwealth towards a looser form of association. By accepting India and then Pakistan as republics, the way was opened for the huge expansion of membership in the late 50's and 60's as colonies in Asia and Africa became independent.

The key to it all was the acceptance of a formula which made allegiance to the crown an option instead of a requirement of membership as in the past. It was agreed that recognition of the king as a symbol of the free association between members of the Commonwealth was sufficient and that the allegiance was no longer necessary.²⁰ For those members who wanted it, the king now became officially "Head of the Commonwealth" instead of king of India,

¹⁷ INCH, PV 4 (Eric Louw Collection), File No.93 (1951: Republican Policy, Caucus Discussions), Dept.Commerce and Industry: Subject: Private, Republican Policy, Caucus Discussions 13 March 1951 and 20 March 1951.

¹⁸ Geyser, Watershed, p.49.

¹⁹ Krüger, The Making of A Nation, p.249.

²⁰ Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.144.

Pakistan, etc. As Miller notes, the agreement left the status of the monarchy "entirely intact", in the United Kingdom and in other countries which wanted to maintain it intact.²¹ It gave the king continued status as a Commonwealth institution, freed India from the crown "with all its associations of coercion and control" and it provided a "perfect face-saving [device] for Britain and India".²²

Most of the credit for devising this agreement has been given to the British prime minister, Attlee, and his Indian counterpart, Nehru. Both showed, according to Mansergh, "imagination and understanding" and there followed a "golden period" of a multi-racial Commonwealth in the 1950's.²³ For Britain the agreement was justified on strategic and economic grounds because it kept India in the Commonwealth and out of what Attlee feared she would join if she were not allowed membership as a republic - an "anti-European, Asiatic union".²⁴ In India arguments for staying in or out of the Commonwealth had raged since independence; but what had been crucial in the decision to stay in was the fear of isolation and the fact that both Ceylon and Pakistan were determined to remain. There was general satisfaction in India with the 1949 agreement, claims Mansergh, although some socialists and communists in the Lok Sabha (Indian parliament) protested.²⁵ Nehru's reaction was summarised in his statement to the Indian Constituent Assembly on May 16 1949:

We join the Commonwealth obviously because we think it is beneficial to us and to certain causes in the world that we wish to advance...it is better to keep a co-operative association going which may do good in this world rather

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mansergh, Commonwealth Experience, p.337.

²⁴ Ibid., p.336.

²⁵ Ibid., p.337.

than break it.²⁶

In the same debate Nehru had earlier been asked how he could join an organisation in which there was racial discrimination and he said in reply that he could have pressed for some changes in the final communique of the conference but chose not to because,

I preferred to create an impression...that the approach of India ...was not a narrow minded approach. I wanted the world to see that India is prepared to co-operate even with those with whom she had been fighting in the past.

In March 1949 Sir Percival Liesching had been sent as an envoy to South Africa to discuss the admission of India as a republic and, although Malan was prime minister, Smuts's views were still "a powerful influence".²⁷ Liesching talked with both Smuts and Malan between March 14 and March 16 and, according to Duncan-Hall, the arguments put forward by Liesching were crucial in changing Malan's initial opposition to the admission of India as a republic.²⁸ Malan admitted this in parliament on 11 May, saying that although he and Smuts had initially been in favour of a treaty relationship between India and South Africa he now saw the importance of keeping India in the Commonwealth as an anti-communist state; besides, he did not want to weaken Commonwealth links.²⁹

Duncan-Hall himself met Malan in October 1954 and said that Malan then seemed "less sure" that it had been right to agree to India's admission as a republic.³⁰ However, one of the prime minister's advisers had told Duncan-Hall that Malan at the time "could not

²⁶ Commonwealth Survey, Jan. - Dec. 1950, Part 1, Constitutional 1a, "India Approves London Declaration", 28 May 1949.

²⁷ Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth, p.844.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p.845.

resist the temptation" to have a republic (India) in the Commonwealth because of its usefulness as a precedent for South Africa.³¹

Malan had good reason to welcome the decision to admit India because it did open the way to that combination of republicanism and Commonwealth membership without antagonising the English South African population to any significant extent.³² Smuts, however, remained opposed to the arrangement saying that it gave Malan a "tarred road to the Republic".³³ He was anxious to make it clear that the exception that had been made for India should not become a precedent for other cases, including South Africa.

The 1949 conference did in fact place on record the view of all governments that the exception made in the case of India did not change the basis of their own membership of the Commonwealth.³⁴ Clearly, however, the precedent had been established and all that was to be required in future was that a member state should notify the others of its intention to become a republic and that it should then request formal permission from the others to continue membership. As Miller points out, this proved to be the "stumbling block" that eventually precipitated South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961.³⁵

Smuts maintained that the only good thing to come out of the 1949 conference was that the other members made a firm stand on maintaining allegiance to the King.³⁶ He regarded symbolic kingship as a "constitutional fiction" and as an encouragement to others like South Africa to become republics. He saw it as a "disservice" to the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.144.

³³ Quoted in Miller, Survey, p.127.

³⁴ Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth, p.860.

³⁵ Miller, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, p.145.

³⁶ Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth, p.863.

world and predicted that acceptance of more than one republic would strain the Commonwealth to the limit.³⁷ His close friend and confidant, Winston Churchill, disagreed, however, and told him that it was better for Britain and the Commonwealth to have India in rather than out.³⁸ In the end Smuts grudgingly agreed, although in reply to Churchill he reiterated that for political reasons he had had to oppose the republican precedent that had emerged from the Declaration of London (the summary of the decisions of the 1949 conference).³⁹

Duncan-Hall noted that it was Malan who was instrumental in having one of the three minutes of agreement at the conference placed on record immediately after the meeting on 26 April 1949.⁴⁰ It referred to the designation of the king as "Head of the Commonwealth" and stated that at Dr Malan's request it was placed on record that this designation did not mean any change in the constitutional relations existing between the members of the Commonwealth. It also stated that it did not imply that the king discharged any constitutional function by virtue of the headship.⁴¹

This, says Duncan-Hall, was a point to which Malan had reverted on several occasions during the discussions. He distrusted the term "Head of the Commonwealth" because it could have laid him open to attack from "the left wing [sic]" of the National Party.⁴² He feared that the formula might be regarded as implying that in some way the Commonwealth was a constitutional entity or a "super-state". As a result, the meeting placed on record the minute mentioned above in

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, Vol.7, p.298.

³⁹ Ibid., p.299.

⁴⁰ Duncan-Hall, Commonwealth, p.876.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p.877.

order to "set all such fears at rest".⁴³

Duncan-Hall claims that the reception given to the Declaration of London throughout the Commonwealth was more or less "uniformly positive".⁴⁴ Of the prominent Commonwealth statesmen only Menzies of Australia and Smuts of South Africa were not happy with it.⁴⁵ Menzies feared it had "damaged the family relationship under the Crown" while Smuts "held out sternly" in South Africa against the "general tide of opinion" in the Union which "found grounds for satisfaction in the saving of India for the Commonwealth and in the help South Africa was getting in her own drift towards a republic".⁴⁶

The Nationalist press, says Duncan-Hall (quoting Die Burger) hailed the declaration as a defeat for Smuts and the end of "all thoughts of the Commonwealth as a constitutional entity, a sort of super-state".⁴⁷ Die Transvaler, however, confined itself at first to an analysis of why it thought Britain would accept India as a republic and noted that, if India were a republic but Pakistan remained a dominion, there could be no thought of war on India's part because it would involve Britain.⁴⁸ Then on 23 April an editorial supported "Malan's standpoint" that there could be republics in the Commonwealth and criticised Smuts ("the greatest imperialist of the twentieth century"), for declaring that the crown was the only binding factor in the Commonwealth.⁴⁹

After India had been accepted as a republic on 28 April, Die

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.862.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Die Transvaler, 20 April 1949.

⁴⁹ Die Transvaler, 23 April 1949.

Transvaler hailed it as victory for the "group which said there could be continual constitutional growth in the Commonwealth" and the newspaper went on to state that Malan's views on the divisibility of the crown were now proved correct.⁵⁰ The crown was no longer necessary for Commonwealth membership, it was claimed. "What can Smuts say now?", was the final comment.

The Sunday Times stated on 1 May under the heading "In South Africa - No Change", that India was a republic but all the other allegiances were unchanged.⁵¹ However, it regretted the fact that "a precedent has been created for any other member who may care to take advantage of it" and it warned Malan not to press ahead with a republican campaign "at the risk of dividing Europeans more".

The Star probably voiced the less than enthusiastic response of most English South Africans when it stated (in the context of the parliamentary debate on the new citizenship laws in June 1949):

We can say that the British Commonwealth in regard to the Crown, is bound and linked as before and that this unity will be associated with the Republic of India which will take its own view of the Crown.⁵²

The republican issue was not, of course, laid to rest after the 1949 conference. Passions on both sides of the white political spectrum were fuelled in the months and years ahead as various issues highlighting the republican question came to light. In April 1950, for example, Malan made a speech at Citrusdal which aroused considerable controversy because of his suggestion that an "elected Governor-General" would be the next step on the road to a republic.⁵³ In parliament one opposition speaker responded to Malan

⁵⁰ Die Transvaler, 28 April 1949.

⁵¹ Sunday Times, 1 May 1949.

⁵² The Star, 11 June 1949.

⁵³ Rand Daily Mail, 3 April 1950.

with the words

if you are going to bring about the kind of republic as laid down at Citrusdal, then I say you are going to break faith with the English-speaking people in this country....The blood of the people can rise over a question like this, that will sweep you people out.⁵⁴

Nationalist speakers, on the other hand, accused the UP of using the issue of an elected governor-general as a "bogey" with which to set English against Afrikaans.⁵⁵ Opposition speakers then pointed out that the right wing of the Nationalist Party under the leadership of Advocate Strijdom still maintained that South Africa should become a republic and leave the Commonwealth at the same time. They quoted Strijdom as saying in parliament on 11 May 1949, when Malan had returned from the London Conference, that

The Nationalist Party's policy is clear; it is the eventual creation of a republic separate from Britain and the Empire. It stands there quite plainly in our party's programme of principles; Articles 9, 10, 11 and 12.⁵⁶

Malan eventually had to reassure the opposition that the question of a republic would not be an issue at an "ordinary general election" and that what he had meant at Citrusdal was that the change from a governor-general to an elected president was the "only step left towards a republic".⁵⁷

In 1954 a flurry of ethnic white sentiment was roused by the introduction of a private member's motion in parliament on the

⁵⁴ House of Assembly Debates, col.4087, 12 April 1950.

⁵⁵ Ibid., col.4083, 12 April 1950.

⁵⁶ Ibid., col.4095, 12 April 1950.

⁵⁷ Ibid., cols.4147-4149, 12 April 1950.

question of a new flag and anthem for South Africa. Malan stated in the House of Assembly that no country aspiring to nationhood could give allegiance to more than one flag and that having two anthems and flags ("God Save the Queen" and the Union Jack as well as "Die Stem" and the South African flag) was "disruptive".⁵⁸ He repeatedly stressed that the Union flag was South Africa's only flag, not the Union Jack which was Britain's and which should not, he said, be the flag of South Africa's association with the Commonwealth. Although the UP opposition stood by the 1927 Agreement (which after years of bitter debate had given the country two flags and anthems), it was clear that this time the debate over national symbols no longer aroused a great deal of excitement in opposition circles. The Star commented:

For our part we see little objection to the formal adoption of the Union Flag and "Die Stem" as the official symbols, the official use of the Union Jack and "God Save the Queen" being confined to specifically Commonwealth occasions. This would, indeed, differ little, if not at all from the official practice.⁵⁹

It was noted, further, that "provocative flag waving" was a "symptom of a political disease", not the disease itself, and that "South Africanism" was too often obstructed by "anti-South Africanisms" of the kind that prompted some of the remarks in the debate in parliament. The debate on the flag and anthem was therefore symptomatic of the movement of the two white sections of the population towards each other, a "toenadering" that had become most prominent in the field of foreign affairs.

(c) The coronation, republicanism and the Commonwealth 1953-54

After the coronation conference of April 1953 the republican issue again flared up in parliament. Taking advantage of the strong pro-

⁵⁸ The Star, 24 February 1954.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

royalty sentiments in South Africa aroused by the pomp and ceremony of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II (and by the fact that Malan had attended the ceremonies with little sign of reluctance or rancour)⁶⁰, the leader of the opposition, J.G.N. Strauss, moved in the House on 7 July that "continued membership of the Commonwealth by the Union under its present Constitution is in the best interests of the Union and will promote national unity and the material welfare of our country".⁶¹ Strauss declared his willingness in return to co-operate with the government "in the field of foreign affairs" and over "the danger of Bantu Nationalism".

A rancorous debate followed in which the usual accusations and counter-accusations of ethnic antagonism were hurled at each other by government and opposition. Eric Louw declared that the republic, when it came about, would "not be a Communistic Republic nor will it be a Left Socialistic Republic and it will certainly not be a liberalistic Republic"⁶² and went on to attack the Labour Party in Britain saying that the Nationalists were not likely "to co-operate in future with a Socialist Government in England".⁶³ These remarks were described as "cheap and unnecessary"⁶⁴ by the opposition member for Salt River (Harry Lawrence) who was joined by other members in defending the Labour Party in Britain for coming to the aid of South Africa at UNO.

The minister of lands and leader of the right-wing of the National Party, J.G. Strijdom, then attacked the opposition motion for being what he called "the dart, the venomous sting" designed "to stab us under the cloak of friendship" and claimed that its aim was to distract the attention of the public from disunity in the United

⁶⁰ Geyser, Watershed, pp.24-25.

⁶¹ House of Assembly Debates, cols.40-41, 7 July 1953.

⁶² Ibid., col.90, 8 July 1953.

⁶³ Ibid., col.91, 8 July 1953.

⁶⁴ Ibid., cols.97-98, 8 July 1953.

Party and to sow dissension in the ranks of the government.⁶⁵ The UP motion intended to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth even as a republic but that this would be decided later "when the time came to take the step".⁶⁶ A republic, he said, would give South Africa "undivided loyalty" from the white population.

The government's counter-amendment was then adopted and won by 89 votes to 57.⁶⁷ It proposed that the issues of a republic and of Commonwealth membership would be decided separately and "not merely by a bare parliamentary majority".⁶⁸ The latter would be decided "at any given time" in the light of the then existing "interests" of South Africa and her "position in the international world".

It was left to the natives' representative, Robert Stuart for the Transkei, to give a black perspective on what was essentially a whites-only debate. Moving an amendment to Malan's counter-amendment he said that a decision to declare a republic should be taken by "native and coloured voters" as well as by European voters.⁶⁹ He was supported by Brian Bunting, one of the communist MPs elected to replace Sam Kahn who had been ejected from parliament in 1952 in the wake of the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act. Bunting, who was similarly ejected a few months after the debate on the UP motion,⁷⁰ launched into a telling attack on the United Party claiming that the motion on Commonwealth membership ended up as an "embarrassment to themselves".⁷¹

The UP, claimed Bunting, had "failed the country" by not stating its

⁶⁵ Ibid., col.109, 8 July 1953.

⁶⁶ Ibid., cols.109-111, 8 July 1953.

⁶⁷ Ibid., cols.141-142, 8 July 1953.

⁶⁸ Ibid., cols.59-60, 7 July 1953.

⁶⁹ Rand Daily Mail, 9 July 1953

⁷⁰ Eddie Roux, Time Longer than Rope, pp.382-3.

⁷¹ House of Assembly Debates, cols.134-5, 8 July 1953.

"no confidence" in the government. It had "learnt nothing" from its election defeat and was "continuing with a policy of appeasement which can only lead to demoralisation and disintegration in their ranks". The whole issue of the Commonwealth had been a "series of red herrings before this House". Strauss had claimed the Commonwealth was valuable firstly as a guarantee against the "rising flood" of African nationalism and secondly against the threat of communism. Thus the government and opposition "saw eye to eye really" on co-operation in the Commonwealth because "for them it is the means of preserving white domination"⁷²:

The African people, it is understandable, cannot take kindly to that view and if membership of the Commonwealth is understood to be a perpetual denial of their aspirations, they will look with different eyes on the Commonwealth from those with which they looked on it in the past.⁷³

Bunting continued to say that Africans wanted "freedom, equality and national independence" in South Africa and Africa and although they wanted normal relations with Britain and admired many British institutions they were "opposed to" and "disappointed" with the tendencies which were developing within the British Commonwealth.⁷⁴ They were disappointed over Gold Coast and over Seretse Khama and "suspicious" of the Central African Federation because it meant "white domination". They were "outraged", he said, by British actions in Kenya which was experiencing "a battle against British Imperialism similar to the Boers fifty years ago":

The tragedy is that whereas fifty years ago the supporters of the present government struck a blow for freedom and independence in this country, today they have taken their stand in the ranks of the Imperialists in trying to deny

⁷² Ibid., col.136.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

national independence to the people of Africa.⁷⁵

Bunting's statements all too accurately mirrored the feelings of the mainstream African press which was expressing its frustration with the impotence and alleged hypocrisy of the United Party in the wake of the 1953 general election results. The background to that election had been what seemed to be a promisingly strong stand taken by white opposition groups to oppose the 1951 Separate Representation of Voters Act (which aimed at the removal of the Cape coloured franchise) but this movement fizzled out into squabbling over Natal separatism and the role of blacks in a new dispensation. The Torch Commando had been formed in April 1951 as an ex-serviceman's extra-parliamentary movement to oppose the government's coloured vote policy. It had formed a United Democratic Front with the United and Labour Parties and for a time achieved a paid up membership "which ran into six figures".⁷⁶ It could never agree, however, on the question of coloured membership and that cost it the support of coloureds in November 1951. Thereafter it fell out with the United Party over the issue of Natal separatism.

The latter movement was represented by G. Heaton Nicholls's "Natal Stand" which aimed at forcing the Nationalists to admit the illegitimacy of their constitutional manoeuvres by advocating the withdrawal of Natal from the Union.⁷⁷ The Torch Commando actively supported this stand and earned the wrath of the United Party which feared a split in its ranks. Although the Torch Commando threw its weight behind the UP during the 1953 election the Nationalists won with an increased parliamentary majority (but not a majority of the

⁷⁵ Ibid., col.137.

⁷⁶ T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa. A Modern History (1st Edition, Macmillan, London, 1977), p.260.

⁷⁷ See Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in My Time, , pp.435-442 for a discussion of the actions and motives of those who formed the United Federal Party after the elections of 1953 and the reasons for its ultimate demise (for which Nicholls largely blamed the leadership of the United Party).

votes cast), taking 94 seats to the UP's 58 and Labour's 4.⁷⁸ The Torch then faded with its "divided spirit" living on in the UP and two new opposition parties, the Union Federal Party (UFP) based in Natal and the non-racial Liberal Party.⁷⁹

To voteless African onlookers all the above manoeuvres within the ranks of the White opposition were depressingly familiar: English-speakers were once again displaying their ambivalence towards the principle of black political rights and when the chips were down were choosing rather to protect their own political privileges. Indian Opinion went so far as to say that it was a case of "better an enemy we know than a friend we do not know".⁸⁰ It claimed that the Nationalists had a straightforward and definite policy and "meant what they said" but the UP, which formed the "bulk of the English-speaking people", were "hypocrites". They would have stood squarely with the Nationalists if their interests weren't being jeopardised. The country was "doomed to destruction" because of the "hypocrisy of English-speakers" and the "utterly narrow nationalism" of the Afrikaners.

The Bantu World in its editorial of 25 April entitled "Election Results" said that:

As far as Africans are concerned, no fundamental difference would have been made by the return of the United Party which was a faithful ally of the Nationalist Party in the passing of the recent anti-Defiance legislation and which seemed to have realised that a smile of friendship towards the African would have a repelling effect upon a good number of voters.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Davenport, South Africa, p.261.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Indian Opinion, 24 April 1953.

⁸¹ Bantu World, 25 April 1953.

The same newspaper said in response to Heaton Nicholls's "Natal Stand" and the proposal of the Union Federal Party to divide the country into English and Afrikaans areas that it was a "counsel of despair, utterly unwarranted by the facts".⁸²

To the African, Senator Nicholls's proposals are interesting...they show what it feels like to have one's political wings clipped and the hope of realising one's ideals frustrated. Such feelings are infinitely more pronounced in an African who is still without the wings with which to fly.

When we look, however, at African and Indian comment on the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953, the strength of pro-monarchical sentiment still seemed undiminished. Not surprisingly, the conservative Bantu World was foremost in its expressions of loyalty to queen and Commonwealth noting in April that "the Queen represents a bond which ties Dr Malan and Dr Nkrumah" and that "it is our duty to see that under that bond we all build better race relations".⁸³ In May the same newspaper somewhat naively expressed the hope that the coronation would be "the beginning of a permanent bridge across the differences that have placed such a severe strain on race relations in our country".⁸⁴ It stated that the coronation and its arrangements for representation from all parts of the Commonwealth, from "all colours and peoples", showed the "unifying power of the Crown" and how it "binds together the family of nations constituting the Commonwealth of Nations which enjoy independence and equality".

It also quoted messages of loyalty and support from among others the editor of Ilanga Lase Natal, who had said that "All the hearts of the Zulu people are with the Queen in her Great Day" and that he hoped that "the reign of our beloved Queen Elizabeth II and her

⁸² Bantu World, 9 May 1953.

⁸³ The Bantu World, 25 April 1953.

⁸⁴ The Bantu World, 30 May 1953.

royal husband [would] follow closely in the illustrious and glorious footsteps of her great grandmother"⁸⁵ A similarly warm message was sent by the old doyen of African conservative liberal politics, D.D.T. Jabavu, but that of Dr A.B. Xuma, ex-president of the ANC, was tempered with more circumspection:

Generally speaking the coronations of Kings and Queens of England are of passing interest and have less meaning for Africans in South Africa. This is partly due to the fact that Africans here have no part to play in such functions and have little benefit from such events.⁸⁶

But he went on to praise the new queen as the granddaughter of Queen Victoria "the Good" who had given Africans and others a common franchise and common citizenship "as far back as 1853". There was more interest for Africans in the coronation, he said, because the queen was personally associated with Africa through her South African tour of 1947 and because of her acceptance of the throne while in Kenya. Both Kenya and South Africa were "tension areas, yearning for democracy"; he concluded.

Indian Opinion was markedly less enthusiastic about the coronation than it had been about the royal tour of 1947. In an editorial of 1 May it merely contrasted what it called the splendour of the "British Pageant" with the "simplicity" of the inauguration celebrations of the American president, Eisenhower.⁸⁷ It noted that the latter "scorned the least relic of class snobbery" and that Eisenhower kept "in step with the common man and therewith justifies democracy". On 15 May Indian Opinion stated that "we are second to none in our loyalty to and our deep affection for Her Majesty the Queen. But [the King and Queen] are just figureheads who

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Bantu World, 30 May 1953.

⁸⁷ Indian Opinion, 1 May 1953.

have no authority of any kind".⁸⁸ All the "pomp and ceremony" was a "farce" and a "squandering of money" for Britain.

"Our woes as Non-Europeans hardly ever reach the ears of the Queen and she is anyway helpless to do anything about them", claimed the editor. Furthermore, the very fact that the question had arisen as to whether non-Europeans should participate in the coronation "shows that there is something wrong somewhere". The coronation celebrations should be "enjoyed equally by all, irrespective of colour" but local authorities were arranging only "crumbs" for non-Europeans while Whites "ate the cake".

A few weeks later, however, a more laudatory editorial appeared under the title "Long Live the Queen" and the editor stated that June 2 (coronation day) "would be a great day for Great Britain and the Commonwealth".⁸⁹ Indians felt proud that India for the first time would participate in the celebrations "not as the Empire's handmaid but as a free and independent nation".

The prayers of every Indian man, woman and child will go out to her gracious Majesty but in South Africa we cannot express our joy outwardly because of discriminatory laws..and..in present circumstances ..Indians cannot be expected to be jubilant, much as they should like to be.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Indian Opinion, 15 May 1953.

⁸⁹ Indian Opinion, 29 May 1953.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 8: Citizenship and Immigration

(a) Introduction

Citizenship laws and immigration policy were inextricably linked and were an important part of the National Party's programme of a gradually loosening of the bonds between South Africa and the British Commonwealth. We have seen how, during Smuts's post-war premiership, National Party spokesmen repeatedly promised to stem the flow of mainly British immigrants to South Africa and to balance the flow with immigrants from other parts of Europe which had more of a cultural affinity with the Afrikaner. This policy aim was usually couched in terms which made it difficult to accuse the Nationalists of direct discrimination against British and Commonwealth citizens but there is not much doubt that the main aim was to reverse what had been seen as a threat that the Afrikaner would be "ploughed under" by the UP's post-war immigration policy.¹ Thus, it was not long before the Nationalists were announcing measures to restrict immigration in general, and more discreetly,² British immigration in particular.

Once new immigration procedures were in place, the Citizenship bill of June 1949 was passed. The bill aimed at abolishing the distinction between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth citizens as regards the process of acquiring citizenship. Dr T.E. Dönges, minister of the interior, was to justify this policy politically as bringing South Africa "up to date" or "in line" with the rest of the Commonwealth.³

(b) Immigration

The measures undertaken by the Nationalists to restrict immigration in general and from Britain in particular were set out in the

¹ Krüger, The Making of a Nation, p.247.

² Brownell, "British Immigration", p.32.

³ House of Assembly Debates, col.7574, 10 June 1949.

framework of draft policy documents which outlined the new government's immigration policy for the period 1948 to 1951.⁴ The main aim was the "maintenance of the existing composition of the European population as far as possible" and it was felt that

the large scale immigration which has taken place under the state sponsored scheme and which has strained the Union's absorptive capacity and aggravated very materially the housing and other shortages in the Union should be reviewed in the light of the aims set out above.⁵

It noted that the government was determined to enforce a more effective and discriminating screening of prospective immigrants by making all prospective immigrants "including those who are not obliged to be screened by the Immigrants Selection Board" (ie. British subjects) liable to be screened.

In a paper by the minister entitled "Wanted - European Immigrants on Selection Basis",⁶ Dönges set out in greater detail the government's immigration policy. He claimed that:

If the great experiment of creating an independent state under white supremacy should succeed and Western civilisation be maintained in Africa for centuries to come, the European population should be increased.⁷

He suggested that an "absorptive capacity" of 2 per cent of the total population was a normal yardstick for annual immigration

⁴ CA, A1646 (Dönges Collection), Vol.213 (Departmental Activities: Immigration Policies 1948 Dec. - 1951 April), "Draft Statement: the Aims of the Government's Immigration Policies" (n.d.) and "Program Insake Immigrasie" (n.d.).

⁵ Ibid., "Draft Statement".

⁶ Ibid., Address by the Minister: "Wanted - European Immigrants on Selection Basis", n.d.

⁷ Ibid., pp.6-7.

numbers but that in the case of the European population 0.6 per cent would be more appropriate if the natural increase in the population was to be taken into account. This would currently translate, he said, into 14000 immigrants per annum. Since "tens of thousands" were willing to come to South Africa the government would "of necessity" have to follow a selection policy. The aim of such a selection policy would be to maintain the European population composition and "way of life", which meant that "people who do not share our Western outlook and who have other ideas about Christianity and democracy than we have will certainly not assist us in maintaining our way of life".⁸

A separate statistical summary for the minister noted that 19058 British immigrants came to South Africa on the Union Castle Line immigrant ships (arranged by the previous government) between May 1947 and 2 June 1948.⁹ Accordingly, in parliament in August 1948 Dönges gave notification that the scheme would be terminated. He gave as his reason the fact that the old government had gone too far in guaranteeing to the Union Castle Company a 100 per cent complement of passengers on the outward voyages and 33 per cent on the return voyages of the immigrant ships.¹⁰ He said that the scheme had been initiated without the prior consultation of parliament and that it committed the country to financial implications that could only be met by ensuring a full complement of immigrants on board each ship. Accordingly there would be no more "Settler Ships" after the end of the year and there would be close screening in future in London and elsewhere.¹¹

Die Burger reported on 20 August 1948 that the British press was "dissatisfied" with the Nationalist government's announced immigration policies but argued in response that "there was nothing

⁸ Ibid., p.7.

⁹ Ibid., "For the Minister", p.72.

¹⁰ Cape Times, 17 August 1948.

¹¹ Cape Argus, 18 August 1948.

else we could do" because "it was the South African government's job to look after South African public interests not British public interests"¹² It stated that the British press saw the whole affair as "none other than anti-British politics" and it quoted the Manchester Guardian as saying that British immigrants "would obviously vote against the Nationalist Government" and that this was why the immigration restrictions were introduced.¹³ Die Burger denied that this was the case and pointed to similar restrictions introduced in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia which, as in South Africa, "had nothing to do with anti-British politics".

By September 1948, however, moves towards further restrictions on immigration from Britain were indicated in the guidelines for screening procedures which had been drawn up in respect of the London Immigration Committee. These guidelines included one ostensibly political motive, namely: "(b) more careful security enquiries...it is felt that the authorities should be better informed as to the leanings of immigrants in regard to Communism".¹⁴ It also stated that the London Immigration Committee would now have to liaise more carefully with the South African-based Immigration Advisory Committee regarding block recruitment schemes and would have to re-screen those who had recently been granted priority immigrant status. The Immigration Advisory Committee would be under the chairmanship of the minister of the interior and all enquiries in relation to immigration policy were now to be addressed to this committee.¹⁵

It is significant that the high commissioner's office in London had been complaining that it was proving difficult to ensure that all

¹² Die Burger, 20 August 1948.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ TA, A78 (Te Water), Vol.5, File A2/1/2 (Immigration: 1948 August 9 to 1949 September 15), Aide Memoire: Discussion on Immigration Policy in Ambassador's Office, South Africa House, London, 9 September 1948.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.4.

the prospective immigrants to South Africa were being screened¹⁶ The reason given was that the Immigrants Regulation Act of 1913 was "fairly widely known" in Britain and that it excluded natural born British subjects from its ambit. Furthermore, although shipping companies and airlines had been asked to issue "D.1.317" forms to potential permanent residents, " these had not been given to all prospective passengers, especially not those of the Union Castle line which, for the case of first class passengers, very rarely sent in forms to the high commission because they are adjudged to be able to comply with the Union's Immigration requirements".

These complaints from the high commission in London could have been, it seems, another motivation for the termination of the Union Castle line agreement, a motivation not mentioned by the minister in parliament. It is also significant in that they seemed to point to the need (from the Nationalist point of view) for a change in the law concerning citizenship. In other words, what was implied was that the process of acquiring South African citizenship by "natural born British subjects" should be made more difficult so as to put them on the same footing as "foreigners" concerning immigration.

What all these policy documents indicate is an increasingly restrictive immigration policy adopted by the Malan government which partially aimed at a reduction of the British element among potential migrants to South Africa. That it succeeded was soon evidenced by the statistics. As Brownell notes, within one year South Africa dropped to the bottom of the list of countries to which British citizens traditionally migrated.¹⁷ (In 1948 South Africa had been on a par with the USA and Australia in terms of numbers of British immigrants).

The Star reported in 1949 that Dr Dönges' "Immigration Sieve" had cut the numbers of British and other immigrants to 6188 from January

¹⁶ A78 (Te Water), Vol.5, File A2/1/2,, Aide Memoire: Office of the High Commission, London, n.d.

¹⁷ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.33.

to April 1949 as compared to 12521 in the first quarter of 1948.¹⁸ The official figures reveal that immigrants granted permanent residence had numbered 28839 in 1947 and 35631 in 1948 but that the numbers had dropped to 14780 in 1949.¹⁹ Of these, in 1949 the proportion from Britain and the Commonwealth dropped to 9197 out of 14780, or less than 63% compared to a proportion of 76% in 1947 and 77% in 1948. The proportion from Holland had risen to 11.7% in 1949 compared to only 5.7% in 1948 and those from Germany had risen to 4.2% compared to only 1.2% the previous year.²⁰

During the next three years the drop in the proportion from Britain and Commonwealth was even more marked: 39% in 1950, 38% in 1951 and 38% again in 1952. If one looks at the period 1948-1956 compared to that of 1940-1947, the proportion of immigrants from British Commonwealth sources dropped from 72% to 47%.²¹ A press statement which gave similar figures from South Africa House in London noted with satisfaction that there had been a fairly constant flow of immigrants to the Union from 1949 to 1954 and that the composition was now "more balanced in the sense that in regard to the countries of origin - England, Holland, Germany and France - the people who emigrated to South Africa in recent years were a much more balanced ratio between those various countries".²²

Brownell points out the dilemma in which the Nationalists found themselves concerning immigration policy. They needed white

¹⁸ The Star, 23 June 1949.

¹⁹ Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, No.25, 1949, p.1117.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ My information for these figures comes from the Official Year Books for 1949 and for the years 1952-1953. My comparison with the Smuts period comes from the Statistical Year Book (1964), B-10, Migration Statistics for the period 1924-1963, Central Statistical Services, Dept. of Statistics, Pretoria.

²² CA, A1646 (Dönges Collection), Vol.214 (Immigrasie Voorleggings 1948 June - 1958 Sept.), Press Statement Issued by the Director of Information, South Africa House, London - "Facts and Figures about Immigration to South Africa", n.d.

immigration for economic reasons and in order to increase the European element vis-a-vis the black population, but at the same time wanted the Afrikaner element to predominate in the white population.²³ This meant restricting immigration in general and British immigration in particular. Thus in the 1950's there was a sharp downward trend in immigration from British and Commonwealth sources that was related to the "essentially negative" immigration policies of the Nationalists. Ideological considerations took precedence and it was only when the NP felt it had successfully settled its political future that it felt confident enough to encourage (European) immigration again. This occurred once Verwoerd had introduced the republic and had left the Commonwealth. As Brownell notes, Verwoerd saw the need for the undivided loyalty of both white sections as necessary before a resumption of large-scale immigration could begin.²⁴

As we have seen, immigration policy in South Africa referred only to whites because of statutory definition (the 1913 Act which gave the minister the discretionary power to deny entry to a "class" of persons deemed "unsuitable").²⁵ During the Malan period the only reference to non-Europeans in immigration matters was to the question of closing the "loophole" left by Smuts concerning the immigration of Indian wives and children. Malan's amended Immigrants Regulation bill which finally closed this loophole was passed with United Party support in September 1953. (One UP member stated in the second reading debate that it was essential to get "unanimity of outlook" by the European population on the "Indian Question").²⁶ However, from the Indian point of view it was seen as a policy of "malice and prejudice".²⁷ The editor of Indian Opinion asked why, since an average of only 320 wives and 360 children had come into

²³ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.33.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.49-50.

²⁵ See Brownell, "British Immigration", p.8 and pp.16-17.

²⁶ Rand Daily Mail, 25 September 1953.

²⁷ Indian Opinion, 18 September 1953.

South Africa annually since 1927, it was really necessary to proceed with what would look to the rest of the world like a "spiteful pinprick?"²⁸

In the event, the bill contributed to the deteriorating relations between India and South Africa which resulted in the closing of the Indian high commission in Durban the following year. It also did not escape the attention of Commonwealth delegates to the fifth Commonwealth unofficial relations conference at Lahore in Pakistan in 1954. There South Africa's racially discriminatory immigration system was referred to by various speakers and was even acknowledged by one South African delegate who said that South Africa unashamedly discriminated in its immigration against those it felt could "never...be absorbed in the political and economic life of the nation".²⁹ Speakers from India and Pakistan, on the other hand, urged South Africa and other white dominions to be more aware of the population pressures in the Asian dominions and therefore to be more amenable in their immigration policies. They did, however, recognise the right of each Commonwealth country to preserve "its own way of life" by determining for itself the number and type of immigrants.³⁰

(c) Citizenship

Before 1961 citizenship and immigration policies and the Commonwealth connection were intimately linked because the process of acquiring citizenship by an immigrant to South Africa depended on that person's status as a (white) British subject (Commonwealth citizen) or his/her status as an "Alien" (non-British or non-Commonwealth citizen). For the latter class of persons the process of acquiring citizenship took up to five years or more of permanent residence in the Union whereas for the former (before

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ N. Mansergh, The Fifth Commonwealth Unofficial Relations Conference, Lahore, Pakistan, p.99.

³⁰ Ibid., p.98.

1949) it took only two years of residence.³¹ The Nationalists, however, wished to abolish altogether the distinction in law between British subject and non-British subject concerning immigration and citizenship and Hertzog had only been prevented from doing so before the war because of the outcry from supporters of the British connection.³² After the war, however, the situation changed to the Nationalist's advantage in a number of ways.

The trend after the war, initiated by Canada and then gradually followed by the other dominions, was towards a situation whereby the separate citizenship of each country became paramount and the common status of British subject was to become of secondary importance. Canada's Citizenship Act of 1946 initiated the newly-defined status of Canadian citizen vis-a-vis the status of British subject (which remained intact but diminished in importance).³³ The latter was secondary in that it now no longer had any legal content or effect and was retained only as a symbol of the political unity of the Commonwealth.

After inter-Commonwealth consultations and the "nationality" conference of February 1947 in London it was agreed that, in order to preserve at least something of the common status, albeit on a new basis, all members of the Commonwealth should make a similar change.³⁴ The change was made in the British Nationality Act of 1948 and in later legislation by other members of the Commonwealth. The essence of it was given in an official summary of the British Act which stated that each country should "legislate" to "determine who are its citizens" and "shall declare those citizens to be British subjects" and "shall recognise as British subjects the citizens of

³¹ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.36.

³² E.A. Walker, A History of Southern Africa (London, Longmans, 1972), p.675.

³³ "Nationality and Citizenship", Round Table, No.281, January 1981, pp.9-10.

³⁴ Duncan Hall, Commonwealth, p.708.

the other countries".³⁵ The expressions "British Subject" and "Commonwealth Citizen" were declared to be of the same meaning and the British Nationality Act went on to define a new and separate citizenship for the United Kingdom and colonies (in keeping with the Canadian precedent).

In 1949 Malan's attendance at the London conference and the decision to accept India as a republic had given the NP the confidence to introduce South Africa's new citizenship laws. Only a month after his return they were introduced in parliament, without notice and towards the end of the session (and also to the surprise and anger of the official opposition).³⁶

South Africa's citizenship laws were, according to Dr T.E. Dönges, Malan's minister of the interior in 1949, "sixth in the race for the Nationality stakes"³⁷ and this was for him sufficient reason why South Africa's laws should also change. In the second reading debate on the government's draft Citizenship bill in June 1949 he outlined four ways of acquiring the newly-defined South African citizenship: by birth, descent, registration (for Commonwealth and Irish citizens) and by naturalisation (for aliens). He claimed this was in accordance with the procedure adopted by other Commonwealth countries and that there was no principle "of substance" that differed from other Commonwealth countries "who have outstripped South Africa in the race to put this legislation on their statute books".³⁸

Only two exceptions, he said, had been introduced. Firstly, there was recognition in the bill of the "constitutional changes" in the Commonwealth as a result of the prime ministers conference in London of that year (the Declaration of London) but the "practical effect"

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.37.

³⁷ House of Assembly Debates, col.7574, 10 June 1949.

³⁸ Ibid., col.7587, 10 June 1949.

of that as far as the Citizenship bill was concerned was "nil". This was because the "practical advantage" of being a citizen of a Commonwealth country rather than an alien had been retained. Secondly, there was a link between the right to vote and citizenship that had "in any case merely formalised the position brought about by prior legislation".

As far as recognition of the new constitutional status of the Commonwealth was concerned, Dönges had earlier explained that "since there was no longer any common status there could not be a common citizenship"³⁹ However, there would still be preferential treatment accorded to citizens of other Commonwealth states (now five years permanent residence instead of two whereas aliens had to wait six years). The only difference was that they would no longer be known by the term "British subject" or "Commonwealth citizen" and this was the only way in which the South African Act differed from the recommendations of Commonwealth conferences.⁴⁰

The parliamentary opposition saw it all very differently. The acting leader of the United Party, J.G.N. Strauss, replied to Dönges by announcing that he and the opposition in general had received a "rude awakening" after Dönges's initial statements in support of the Commonwealth connection.⁴¹ The rude awakening related to the abolition of the common citizenship and other measures that weakened the Commonwealth connection in the bill. He criticised the way in which it was being "forced through" the House at the end of the session "with only three weeks left" to decide it.⁴² The bill failed to provide for the "Common Clause", the key clause which was agreed upon at the conference of experts and which appeared in all the Acts of member countries of the Commonwealth. Even Canada's 1946 legislation referred to Canadian citizens as British subjects, he

³⁹ Ibid., col.7579, 10 June 1949.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., col.7590, 10 June 1949.

⁴² Ibid., col.7591, 10 June 1949.

noted, and in Australia a British subject who was not Australian-born would be able to become an Australian citizen by a simple act of registration.

The bill did not make sufficient distinction, Strauss noted, between the citizens of the Commonwealth who applied for registration and aliens who applied for naturalisation.⁴³ It made the position of a British immigrant almost indistinguishable from that of an alien and seemed to be "a cold and very meaningful step by the Minister"⁴⁴ This, he said, was especially relevant if the situation was compared to that of Australia where a British immigrant could vote after one year's residence whereas South Africa required five years residence and only after the minister had decided whether the immigrant was fit to become a South African citizen or not. Here he was referring to the new test of knowledge of the "responsibilities" of citizenship required by the bill, a test which Strauss described as "political indoctrination cleverly disguised as courses in civics, history and so forth".⁴⁵

Furthermore, sub-clause (3) which provided for deprivation of citizenship at the minister's discretion could be used "to deprive a member of this House of his citizenship and of his seat in this House and so secure a precarious majority of his party".⁴⁶ In fact a test case of exactly this possibility was provided by W.G. Ballinger whose position in the Senate was immediately challenged by the Nationalists on the grounds that his British nationality would not any longer qualify him for South African citizenship. As his wife Margaret Ballinger pointed out, Ballinger held the balance in the Senate and thus the Nationalists challenged his citizenship and, through his, her own position in the House of Assembly.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., col.7597, 10 June 1949.

⁴⁴ Ibid., col.7598, 10 June 1949.

⁴⁵ Ibid., col.7600, 10 June 1949.

⁴⁶ Ibid., col.7603, 10 June 1949.

⁴⁷ Ibid., col.7870, 14 June 1949.

As the debate on the bill proceeded, the opposition comments became considerably more heated with at least one UP member (A.E.Trollip, Brakpan) reminding Dönges that the question of citizenship had in the past led to war - the Anglo-Boer War.⁴⁸ Mrs Ballinger continued the opposition attack by describing the Nationalists' talk of citizenship being a privilege not a right as "so much nonsense" because, she argued, citizenship was the right of anybody who was prepared to subscribe to the "fundamental principles of the type of State to which we belong" and not to what she called "some old beastly Nazi methods".⁴⁹ She claimed that the government had already cancelled the Commonwealth bond "to the extent that it was able" and that it was forcing English-speakers back on the "hospitality that Britain will undoubtedly offer them when this country treats them like Uitlanders". She went on to say that South Africa had not yet solved the problem of relations between white and black "let alone the problem of relations between Afrikaners and Englishmen" but that the government was going out of its way to "drive us apart".⁵⁰

As opposition to the bill mounted in parliament so it did in the country at large. On 20 June the South African Legion, representing thousands of returned servicemen, complained to Dönges that thousands of these soldiers who were expecting to receive South African citizenship on completion of the two-year residence qualification introduced by Smuts in 1948 would now find that they had to wait five years instead.⁵¹ On 23 June the Worcester branch of the United Party conveyed a unanimous resolution objecting in "the strongest possible terms" to the Citizenship bill especially because "it failed to recognise the principle of Commonwealth Status", it unduly extended "the arbitrary and autocratic powers of the Minister

⁴⁸ Ibid., col.7604, 10 June 1949.

⁴⁹ Ibid., col.7873, 14 June 1949.

⁵⁰ Ibid., col.7875, 14 June 1949.

⁵¹ CA, A1646 (Dönges Collection), Vol.113 (State Activities - Parliament - Minister of Internal Affairs - Immigration Arrangements), Letter from the National Secretary of the SA Legion to the Private Secretary for the Minister of the Interior, 20 June 1949.

of the Interior" and it deprived Commonwealth subjects who had already immigrated to the country of their conferred right to citizenship after two years.⁵²

Brownell notes that some 55000 British immigrants since World War II would have qualified for the vote by the time of the 1953 elections had the previous two-year qualification remained in force.⁵³ This was therefore an obvious political consideration for the Nationalists in introducing the Citizenship bill. As the Rand Daily Mail noted on 12 March 1949, the Nationalists were "naturally concerned about their political future".⁵⁴ Dr A.J.R. van Rhijn, the future high commissioner in London, noted in the Assembly that if large numbers of British migrants were allowed to vote "they might as well determine which government is going to govern the country".⁵⁵

The Star had reported on 14 June that 4000 people joined a lunch-time protest in Johannesburg against the bill and that a telegram had been sent to the minister expressing the opposition of the "citizens of Johannesburg" to the discretionary powers granted to him and demanding that British immigrants already in the country receive their citizenship after two years as originally promised to them by the previous government.⁵⁶

The Star, however, did not condemn the bill outright. In an editorial of 11 June it recognised that the old common nationality for the whole Commonwealth "was not achievable".⁵⁷ It also

⁵² Ibid., Telegram from the Worcester Branch of the United Party to Minister T.E. Dönges, House of Assembly, Cape Town, 23 June 1949.

⁵³ Brownell, "British Immigration", p.38.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Brownell, "British Immigration", p.38.

⁵⁵ House of Assembly Debates, Col. 7709, 13 June 1949.

⁵⁶ The Star, 14 June 1949.

⁵⁷ The Star, 11 June 1949.

recognised the racial nature of the whole debate by saying:

The plain English of the matter is that white British subjects are admitted to the white Dominions because they are white and not because they are citizens of a sister state. Citizens of the Republic of Ireland rank as white British subjects, a circumstance that reveals the failure of the law to conceal an inner reality of Dominion nationality laws, namely, that they are colour bars.⁵⁸

All that the editor objected to was the length of time that British subjects now had to wait to gain citizenship, the powers of the minister and the temptation to use those powers against a number of opposition MPs who had not been born in South Africa. The Star also criticised the "steamrolling" of the bill through parliament in the last days of the session in order to "prevent thousands of British immigrants who could otherwise qualify for the vote in the next few months from doing so for several years".⁵⁹

Die Transvaler, on the other hand, accused the opposition of starting a "poisonous" campaign against the bill in order to discredit the government with English-speakers by suggesting that it wished to suppress everything British.⁶⁰ It also asked what the fuss was all about since other Commonwealth countries already had similar provisions. Similarly, Die Burger noted that the five-year clause relating to residence was the same as that for Canada and that the only difference was the use of the minister's discretion which had existed in any case in South Africa since 1926 in relation to "foreigners". The UP had never complained about that, it noted.⁶¹

To the outraged protests of the UP the government applied the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Die Transvaler, 10 June 1949.

⁶¹ Die Burger, 10 June 1949.

guillotine to any further debate on 16 June and the bill passed the second reading stage by 77 votes to 68. The bill became law on 23 June and what had been one of the most "disharmonious and cacophonous" parliamentary sessions⁶² passed into history. In the Senate, Heaton-Nicholls spoke of a "breach of faith" with the Commonwealth, described the bill as "sheer republicanism" and noted that it "could destroy the Club itself".⁶³ In Britain The Economist gave what the South African high commissioner in London described as "perhaps the most sweeping and certainly the longest criticism against South African policy in recent months".⁶⁴ It claimed that the Nationalists were intending to ride roughshod over the interests of all other groups and that they "had taken the Union back in one stride to the days of Paul Kruger".⁶⁵ However, "the English section of the Europeans must accept some of the blame, as they are now experiencing some of the results of allowing intolerance to reach its present pitch".⁶⁶

⁶² The South African Weekly, 24 June 1949.

⁶³ The Star, 24 June 1949.

⁶⁴ TA, A78 (Te Water), Vol.5, File AE 2/1/2 (Immigration: 1948 Aug.9 - 1949 Sept.15), Weekly Summary of British Press Comment from June 24th to July 1st 1949, No.39., from the SA High Commissioner, London.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 9: Defence and Economic Issues(a) Introduction

White ethnic passions in South Africa were not aroused to such an extent when it came to questions of Commonwealth co-operation in the fields of defence, trade, and finance as they had been during the row over citizenship. With a few exceptions in the parliamentary ranks, opposition and government were at one in their desire for continued Commonwealth defence and economic links, for ideological as well as practical reasons. After all, this was the period of heightened Cold War tensions following the Berlin Crisis and outbreak of the Korean War and both the main white parties were united in their opposition to Communism. As the key member of the Western alliance in Europe and the Middle East, Britain could not be ignored even by the most anti-British Nationalist. There was, in general, little alternative to the "Commonwealth nexus" because there was "simply no other international group into which South Africa could be accommodated".¹ The Te Water mission had shown that there was little indication of success for South African attempts to form her own regional organisation in Africa and certainly not for any which did not have the support and co-operation of the main colonial power, Britain.

However, during the Malan years there were, from the point of view of both the UP and the government, worrisome signs of Britain's inability to maintain her global defence and economic commitments. In the early fifties the withdrawal from India and Pakistan and outbreaks of agitation in Egypt over Suez threatened to undermine the strategic unity of the Commonwealth. This weakness had already been demonstrated during World War II and was now for a time masked by the growing British partnership with the USA in alliances such as CENTO and SEATO.² It was the Suez crisis of 1956 which marked the end of the Commonwealth as an independent defence system and which,

¹ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.393.

² Ibid., p.394.

together with British withdrawal from most of Africa, left South Africa realising how "naked" she was in defence terms.³ In Malan's period this was already becoming apparent and the securing of a defence agreement with Britain, particularly in Africa, remained the most-sought after prize.

Similarly, in economic matters, co-operation with Britain and the sterling Commonwealth remained a priority during Malan's period despite signs of the Commonwealth's economic unity coming under pressure. Britain's ability to provide all the investment needs of the sterling area had long since broken down and in the fifties the growth of GATT-sponsored multi-lateralism meant a decline in the relative value of Commonwealth preferences for South Africa and the other dominions. However, Britain remained South Africa's chief source of imports and investment capital as well as her most important export market until well into the 1960's and the benefits of remaining in the sterling area became apparent to most Nationalists despite their earlier ideological opposition to the "Imperial" trading system.

It was left, once again, to a dwindling handful of liberal and left-wing voices in the white parliament to articulate the fears and protests of the black majority concerning the racially exclusive debate over defence and economic policy during the first five years of Nationalist rule. It was this group, whose numbers had diminished considerably following the expulsion of the communists from the Assembly in 1952, who consistently put forward the view that any regional defence alliance for Africa was doomed to fail because of the government's refusal to arm blacks and because of its race policies in general. Similarly, the extra-parliamentary opposition, in various statements on foreign policy, condemned what were seen as attempts by South Africa and the colonial powers in conjunction with the United States to impose a new "imperialist hegemony" in Africa.⁴

³ Ibid., p.395.

⁴ See for example the Presidential Address by the Transvaal leader of the ANC, J.B. Marks, at the opening of the regional congress 30 Sept.-1 Oct.1951, AD 2186 (ANC Collection), B

(b) Military co-operation

From the British point of view, Malan's government seemed to be even more willing than the previous pro-Commonwealth government of General Smuts to co-operate on defence measures. For example, Gordon Walker's memorandum of 1950 on relations with South Africa noted that the Nationalists were "staunchly anti-Communist" and that Malan had more than once pledged South Africa's support in any war resulting from "Russian aggression" as well as having provided air-crews in the Berlin airlift and having agreed to send a squadron to Korea.⁵ The Labour cabinet which met to discuss Gordon Walker's memorandum in 1950 noted that "good progress" was being made in the defence discussions with the South African minister of defence, F.C. Erasmus, and that the latter seemed more ready to enter into defence commitments "than any of his predecessors had been".⁶ The Tories after 1952 also stressed the value of South Africa's willingness to co-operate in defence matters, even going so far as to reassure Malan that on defence matters there would always be a difference "in fact if not in status" between old and new Commonwealth members.⁷ On some matters, Lord Swinton said to Malan, the old dominions were given "full information" and were taken into full consultation" while there was a "more limited" exchange with the Asiatic countries.⁸

Jack Spence explained the changed Nationalist attitude to co-operation with Britain and the Commonwealth in the early fifties as

a.2.(3), Presidential Address, p.1.

⁵ PRO, CAB 129/42, C.P.(50)214, "Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 25 September 1950.

⁶ PRO, CAB 128/18, C.M.62(50)4, "Relations with South Africa", 28 September 1950.

⁷ PRO, CAB 129/61, C.(53).165, "Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 5 June 1953.

⁸ Ibid.

being the result of the Nationalists seeing the Commonwealth as a "buffer against external hostility".⁹ Apartheid had become the symbol of South Africa's domestic policy to the outside world and the hostility that this new policy engendered put South Africa into a "Cold War" situation. The militant anti-Communism of the Nationalists in the Cold War between East and West then made it even more urgent for their leaders to search for alliances. However, as Spence points out, the very foundations of the Nationalists' domestic policy made this search for allies extremely difficult.¹⁰ The Commonwealth remained South Africa's only "natural ally" but unlike the other white dominions and because of her domestic policies, South Africa had no regional defence pact to fall back on. The closest she ever came to such a pact was the Nairobi conference of 1951 with the colonial powers in Africa and the Dakar conference of 1954. But the discussions broke down when, as Spence notes, it became clear that the South African government would not be a party to any military arrangements entailing the use of arms by Africans.¹¹

Berridge has pointed out that the relationship between South Africa and Britain (and other colonial powers in Africa) during Malan's period and up until 1960 amounted to an "entente".¹² An "entente" he defines as more of an "informal" military relationship than an alliance, based on "shared political and strategic assumptions" and on collaboration in areas such as staff talks, arms sales, use of military bases and manoeuvres.¹³ Despite South Africa's attempts to turn the entente into an alliance towards the end of the 1950's the arrangement suited both sides because of the political difficulties

⁹ J. Spence, "South Africa and the Modern World", in Wilson and Thompson (eds.), Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.2, p.487.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.479.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, Introduction, XI.

¹³ Ibid., Introduction, XI.

in the way of a more formal commitment. In South Africa the new National Party government did not share the "kindred ideals" and the "community of outlook" of the Commonwealth and so the idea of an entente with Britain was "one thing", "an entente with all of the colonial powers in Africa was something else - and an alliance with them all was something else again".¹⁴

South Africa preferred an alliance with all the Western powers and one which would be directed against Soviet and African-supported black nationalists. Britain, on the other hand, preferred a South African commitment concerning reinforcements for the Middle East and was reluctant to support South Africa's idea of African defence (expressed in Malan's African Charter). The African pact proposed by Malan was seen as a "dangerous political liability" in London because the Nationalists would see it as a substitute for the Commonwealth and because it would cause hostility in colonial West Africa, the Middle East and India.¹⁵

At Dakar in 1954 there was still evidence of European interest in joint arrangements with South Africa for the movement of troops and supplies and the USA sent an observer to both the Nairobi and Dakar conferences, a move which seemed to indicate some sort of role for NATO. All of these plans eventually came to nought because of South Africa's racial policies, the collapse of the Central African Federation and the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961.

During the early fifties South Africa's main interest, however, was to obtain some sort of European security body for the defence of Africa while for Britain the chief priority was to involve South Africa in defence of the Middle East. In the end South Africa made a commitment to supply one division of troops and an air squadron to the Middle East in the event of war while the Simonstown Agreement which was eventually concluded in 1955 gave to South Africa

¹⁴ Ibid., X111.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.13.

Britain's vague assurance of troops for the defence of Africa¹⁶ - commitments which proved to be so vague and open-ended that they were never implemented by either side even during crises such as Suez in 1956.

What then, in concrete terms, did co-operation between South Africa and Britain amount to during Malan's period of rule? Besides some combined naval and air exercises and some sharing of technical information the only really significant military commitment agreed to during the Malan period seems to have been what Gordon Walker described in his 1950 memorandum as South Africa's "firm commitment" [in the event of war] to the Middle East of one armoured division plus aircraft and naval forces.¹⁷ This was first confirmed in the South African parliament in 1951 and was debated regularly in subsequent years. In 1954 the British defence minister, Earl Alexander, mentioned in cabinet that the agreement still existed and used it as an argument in favour of giving sovereignty over the Simonstown base back to South Africa.¹⁸

In the South African parliament the UP leader, J.G.N. Strauss, criticized the government for making such a commitment without consulting parliament especially in view of what he saw as "inevitably heavy sacrifices" that South Africans would have to bear in the event of war breaking out in the "seething cauldron" which was the Middle East.¹⁹ Malan, in reply, said that South Africa would co-operate with NATO and the "Middle Eastern Countries themselves" as well as with the Commonwealth in preventing an "enemy invasion" from the Middle East.²⁰ It would only involve an air squadron and an

¹⁶ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.59.

¹⁷ PRO, CAB 129/42, C.P.(50)214, "Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 25 September 1950.

¹⁸ PRO, CAB 128/27, C.C.59(54)11, "South Africa: Simonstown Base", 8 September 1954.

¹⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.4306, 24 April 1952.

²⁰ Ibid., col.4324, 24 April 1952.

army division "in war time not peace time".²¹

Malan also referred in the same speech to discussions with the colonial powers at Nairobi in 1951 "concerning the sending of troops north, transport, etc".²² but without mentioning the problem of South Africa's opposition to Africans carrying arms. It was Margaret Ballinger who had to point out that there was little chance of finding common ground with "northern neighbours" so long as South Africa's "Native" policy was "so different to that in the North".²³

By 1954 Strauss had forgotten his earlier concerns about South African commitments in the Middle East and was more interested in urging the government to form a common front with the colonial powers against Communism and "Moscow's interference in Africa".²⁴ He noted the American president Eisenhower's statement that the communists were trying to "arouse the Native people" into revolt against Europeans in Africa and asked Malan to provide further information on what steps he was taking to form a "Pan-African Organisation". Malan agreed with Strauss about the "danger of Communism" and the need for a defence pact for Africa and blamed communist agitators and the UNO for saying to Africans: "You are being oppressed".²⁵

Nationalist and UP speakers generally rejected the argument of Margaret Ballinger that a defence pact would only succeed if Africans were allowed to be armed. It would mean, argued one Nationalist MP, "the end of western civilisation in Africa".²⁶ "One

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., col.4347, 24 April 1952.

²⁴ House of Assembly Debates, col.4386, 3 May 1954.

²⁵ Ibid., cols 4415-19, 3 May 1954.

²⁶ Ibid., col. 4427, 3 May 1954.

does not hand a rifle to a child", said Malan.²⁷ Britain, he said, should take the lead in forming a defence pact, not South Africa, because Britain had "more influence in Africa as a whole".²⁸

Ballinger argued in the 1954 debate that if a "Third World War" were to break out between East and West it would be necessary to ensure that trained African troops were ready to help defend their homeland and to ensure that they did not "go over to the enemy" because of South Africa's race policies.²⁹ She was supported by the UP member for Hillbrow, Dr B. Friedman, who criticised Malan's statements on the arming of Africans and who asked if the government would be prepared to hold conferences to which South Africa's northern neighbours could send their delegates "irrespective of race or colour".³⁰ (He was met with a resounding "No!" from the assembled parliament). Unless the latter were possible, he continued, it was useless to talk of initiating a Pan-African movement in any case.

The Star in its report on the 1954 debate in parliament noted that there had been "hardly any room for disagreement" between government and opposition concerning the question of co-operation between South Africa and the Commonwealth in defence matters and praised Malan for being the "last of the Imperialists".³¹ However, in November The Star noted in the context of discussions with Britain over Simonstown that South Africa's opposition to the arming of "Natives" might well become "one of the big stumbling blocks in the way of unqualified South African participation in an African Defence Force".³² It reported that the British defence minister, Harold MacMillan, was considering a suggestion by his South African counterpart, Erasmus, for the establishment of an African defence

²⁷ Ibid., col. 4496, 4 May 1954.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., cols 4503-4, 4 May 1954.

³⁰ Ibid., col. 4530, 4 May 1954.

³¹ The Star, 4 May 1954.

³² The Star, 2 November 1954.

organisation but stated:

We must recognise, however, that we cannot escape isolation in Africa or expect the utmost possible security unless we are prepared to co-operate with other African populations, White or Black, on terms acceptable to them as well as to ourselves.³³

Ultimately, of course, this editorial was correct in its analysis. The British would prove reluctant to be drawn into any South African scheme for the defence of Africa because of the perceived unpopularity of apartheid and the resentment it created in the rest of Britain's colonial empire.³⁴ But, in order to appease the South African demand for an African military treaty and in the hope of securing forces for the Middle East, the Commonwealth relations office on the advice of the high commissioner in South Africa, Liesching, tried to buy off Erasmus and Eric Louw (the most persistent Nationalist ministers) with the promise of an agreement over Simonstown.³⁵ In the British cabinet the Commonwealth secretary's arguments in favour of an agreement over Simonstown centred on "encouraging South Africa to take a broader view" of its responsibilities in Commonwealth defence.³⁶ This argument eventually outweighed Churchill's own fears about the wisdom of handing over the sovereignty of such an important British naval base to an uncertain ally like South Africa.

(c) Trade and the sterling area, 1948-54

We saw in Chapter 3 how the Nationalists, in various policy statements before 1948, had criticised the imperial trading system and had promised to put South Africa's foreign trade on a "business"

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.324-326.

³⁵ Ibid., p.324.

³⁶ PRO, CAB 128/27, C.C.(54)57,4, "South Africa: Simonstown Naval Base", 27 August 1954.

footing by ending Commonwealth preference and by treating Britain and the Commonwealth as "foreign" countries for trade purposes.³⁷ After 1948, however, the National Party did not do much to put such policies into effect other than by encouraging import substitution and a diversification from British sources in the buying of equipment for state-controlled enterprises such as the South African Railways.³⁸ Voices were occasionally raised in parliament against the imperial preference system, for example that of J.C. Brill (Mayfair) who complained in 1948 that it was very "dangerous" to give preference to one nation because differentiation by means of preferential tariffs made it difficult for the National Party to "make friends" with other nations³⁹ and that taxpayers' money had in the past been "wasted" by not buying "better quality" American equipment because of preference.

Such protests were not as significant, however, as the ministerial pronouncements in favour of continued association with the sterling area and the Commonwealth preferential system. For example, the minister of finance, N.C. Havenga, stated in parliament in January 1952 that there were many benefits for South Africa in being part of the sterling area, including the lack of restrictions on the flow of capital from Britain, the ease with which international payments could be made from London and the fact that it would have been difficult to find "alternative export markets for our fruit and

³⁷ See chapter 3, pp.45-47.

³⁸ It is difficult to distinguish between political motives and purely economic factors such as price competitiveness and delivery time when looking at government department buying policies. In the case of SAR railway locomotives it seems that British firms had difficulty meeting delivery times in the early 1950's but this does not altogether explain the vociferousness of the threats in parliament to buy elsewhere. In 1953 the minister of transport said in parliament that he had warned Britain about the late deliveries of locomotives which had been ordered in 1949 but which were only coming in now and that such late deliveries might force South Africa to stop buying British equipment (Rand Daily Mail, 4 August 1953).

³⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.1375, 1 September 1948.

wines"⁴⁰ Speaking at a time when the sterling area was going through one of its periodic balance of payments crises, Havenga noted that South Africa had much to lose from the disintegration of the sterling area and the collapse of sterling as an international currency. In much the same way as Jan Smuts had acted during the 1947 sterling crisis, he now suggested that South Africa make another "sacrifice" in order to assist the sterling area through yet another "critical period" by drawing upon South Africa's gold reserves.⁴¹

The conversion of the National Party government to a pro-Commonwealth policy in economic matters can be explained mainly by economic imperatives - in particular, the realisation that it would be well-nigh impossible to break away from the sterling area given South Africa's position in the then current international trading conditions. Heavily reliant on the sale of gold in London in order to overcome persistent current account deficits and still dependent on the British market for certain key agricultural exports, it would have been economically and politically disruptive to cause a sudden break at a time when the Nationalists were not even sure of a continued parliamentary majority. Although it may have seemed to contemporary observers that Britain was more dependent upon South Africa economically than the reverse (for example, the gold loan of 1947) the truth is that both economies were heavily reliant upon each other and the inheritance of 150 years of trading and financial interconnections could not be abolished overnight.

The precarious nature of South Africa's financial situation and the importance of sterling area support was made apparent to Malan's government soon after the elections in 1948. A Balance of Payments crisis which had been developing for some time as a result of excessive dollar expenditures. (In May, Smuts's treasury officials

⁴⁰ Quoted in Commonwealth Survey, 1952, 1 h (Trade and Finance) (9), "South Africa and Sterling", 1 February 1952, pp.15-16.

⁴¹ Ibid.

had noted that the reserves had reached a critical point towards the end of August, were being depleted at the rate of £3.5m p.m and that they could not "continue this strain very much longer").⁴² In that month The Star claimed that the minister of finance, Havenga's "disinclination" to impose any sort of import control from dollar countries might "imperil the Union's currency resources" and reported the governor of the Reserve Bank as saying that South Africa's gold reserves and sterling balances would run out by the beginning of 1950, if not earlier.⁴³

In August, Malan's roving ambassador, Charles te Water, was sent on a mission to Britain, the United States and Europe in order to investigate the possibility of a loan for South Africa and also to calm the fears of foreign investors who felt that the new Nationalist government heralded a period of instability in South Africa. Although Te Water denied that these were the aims of his mission he did admit that the Union's dollar position was "unsatisfactory" and that the Union might have to institute import control.⁴⁴ An alternative, he said, might be an American loan or the possibility of persuading the Americans to agree to a higher price for gold.

By October the balance of payments situation had worsened and Forsyth, secretary of external affairs, cabled Te Water to say that the government had decided on action early in November to reduce the Union's non-sterling expenditure on consumer goods by at least 50 per cent.⁴⁵ He noted, however, that the Union's sterling reserves were sufficient to cover the country's requirements for at least two

⁴² TA, A1 (Smuts Collection), B (Union of South Africa Papers 1945 -48), Vol.173 (March -May 1948), No.52 A, Letter from F.C. Sturrock (Treasury, Pretoria), to Prime Minister, J.C. Smuts, 17 May 1948.

⁴³ The Star, 10 August 1948.

⁴⁴ Die Burger, 20 August 1948.

⁴⁵ TA, A78 (Te Water Collection), Vol.9, File AE 3/1 (Economic Development in South Africa: General), Forsyth- Te Water, 27 October 1948.

years and that therefore it was not envisaged that there would be any restrictions on purchases on countries in the sterling area. If import control measures on dollar goods did not suffice, he wrote, it might be necessary to look into the possibility of an American loan.⁴⁶ Te Water, who had been encountering a flood of bad publicity in the USA, wrote back to say that it might be necessary for the government to take steps at home "to combat criticisms".⁴⁷ He enclosed an article from the Wall Street Journal of 19 October which called Malan's government "among other things, anti-negro, anti-Jewish, anti-Indian, anti-Mulatto and anti-British" and which claimed there was a "marked lack of confidence" on the part of Wall Street and Throgmorton Street and there had been a greater flow of British capital away from the Union than towards it in the "past few months".⁴⁸ On 3 November Te Water wrote to Lord Cato, governor of the Bank of England, for assistance in arranging interviews with US treasury officials "to inform them of the purpose of my visit", as he put it.⁴⁹

On 5 November Havenga had to announce to the House of Assembly wide-ranging restrictions on dollar imports and stated that if the measures were not sufficient to improve South Africa's reserves, a loan would be sought.⁵⁰ Te Water's "informal" approaches to the US government meanwhile proved fruitless and were not helped along by Havenga's "bait" in the form of a promise to give priority to relaxation of restrictions on dollar countries as soon as there was an improvement in the reserve position.⁵¹

All that Te Water was able to achieve in the USA was that a

⁴⁶ Ibid., Forsyth - Te Water, 1 November 1948.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Te Water - Forsyth, 29 October 1948.

⁴⁸ Wall Street Journal, 19 October 1948.

⁴⁹ A78 (Te Water), Vol.9, AE 3/1, Te Water - Lord Cato, 3 November 1948.

⁵⁰ The Times (London), 5 November 1948.

⁵¹ The Economist, 13 November 1948.

reportedly favourable attitude was taken by the semi-private US Import-Export Bank for a possible loan in return for a contract by South Africa to supply "agreed quantities" of base minerals to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation or the Federal Supplies Organisation.⁵² Forsyth advised the SA Legation in Washington that it was not proposed that the World Bank be approached for a loan "because it would suggest to other countries that we are in financial distress" whereas the "real position" was that South Africa "had to pass by valuable opportunities "for lack of sufficient capital".⁵³ On 7 February Havenga announced that the government had made arrangements to sell a small part of the Union's gold output to a London bullion trading firm at a price which was 20 per cent above the official world price. This measure was greeted with scepticism by financial circles in London.⁵⁴

In contrast, with the coolness and disinterest that was displayed by the Americans, it was reported on 18 January 1949 that the British government was taking a "favourable view" of the prospects of a Union loan in London and that the approval of the Capital Issues Committee would be a "mere formality".⁵⁵ On 10 February the South African high commissioner in London, Lief Egeland, was asked to approach the British chancellor of the exchequer directly about a loan because Havenga was being "pressed" in parliament with suggestions of a London loan so as not to "curtail [future] capital developments" and so as to avoid possibly imposing "restrictions" on sterling area imports.⁵⁶

⁵² A78 (Te Water), Vol.9, AE 3/1, Memorandum for the Union Minister in Washington, 21 December 1948

⁵³ Ibid., Forsyth - SA Legation, Washington, 4 January 1949.

⁵⁴ The Financial Times described the measure as "No Great Relief" to South Africa's "pressing foreign exchange difficulties" and The Times said the effect on the reserves would be negligible.

⁵⁵ A78, Vol.9, AE 3/2/1 (United Kingdom Loan Negotiations: 1949 Jan - Feb.) Secretary of SA Treasury, J.Holloway to L.Egeland, High Commissioner, London, 18 January 1949.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Holloway - Egeland, 10 February 1949.

Te Water then informed Havenga on the 15th that he had spoken to Stafford Cripps, the British chancellor of the exchequer, who had expressed "dislike" of the idea because a South African loan might "induce" a "run on the London capital market".⁵⁷ However, he did suggest that the British government would "be agreeable" to South Africa taking sterling in lieu of the gold loan of 1948 thus enabling South Africa to obtain the currency needed to finance capital development programmes from sterling sources.

Later in the same year Havenga was obliged to do exactly that - to recall the balance of the gold loan and to promise that imports from the sterling area would be paid for in gold.⁵⁸ He was also obliged to follow the United Kingdom's lead and to devalue the South African pound from 4.03 to 2.80 dollars, a move that helped to make possible the reduction of import controls by the beginning of 1950.⁵⁹

All of this reveals how dependent South Africa still was on the sterling area financial system in the early post-war period. South Africa (and the other dominions) could only protest at the way in which the British had taken the decision to devalue sterling unilaterally without consulting their Commonwealth partners in advance⁶⁰ but their economies were still inextricably linked to sterling. However, Malan's government did not altogether abandon plans for a loosening of the financial and trading ties with Britain and the Commonwealth, despite or perhaps because of the realisation of such dependency. A programme of industrial diversification and economic self-sufficiency had long been part of National Party policy as had been evidenced during the period of Hertzog's Pact government in the 1920's. This was now accelerated in the 1950's as South Africa's apartheid-induced isolation became increasingly

⁵⁷ Ibid., Te Water - Havenga, 15 February 1949.

⁵⁸ E.A. Walker, A History of Southern Africa, p.789.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Brindley Thomas, "The Evolution of the Sterling Area" in N. Mansergh and R. Wilson et al, Commonwealth Perspectives, pp.188-9.

apparent.

Eric Louw, minister of economic affairs, explained his government's industrial policy in an article for publication in London in 1953.⁶¹ He outlined the growth of new industries in South Africa which included uranium extraction and oil from coal and went on to praise the "diversification" of the South African economy since the war.⁶² He claimed that import restrictions on trade were "temporary expedients". In a further article of the same year he stated that the import controls (introduced in 1952) were "non-discriminatory" and allowed importers the "widest possible choice between alternative sources of supply".⁶³ "Soft-currency" countries [non-dollar] such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom and other West European countries, he said, could compete on a "completely non-discriminatory basis", although dollar goods still fell into the "restricted" category. He went on to affirm South Africa's "adherence to the basic principle of multi-lateralism in the conduct of its international trade" and also to defend the policy of protectionism for secondary industries which were making "valuable contributions" to South Africa's "economic stability".

South Africa's moves towards "non-discrimination" in its international trading relations dovetailed neatly with the wider context of a gradual post-war development of world trade towards multi-lateralism and the reduction of tariffs. By acceding to the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1947 Smuts's government had already committed itself together with the other dominions to a modification of Commonwealth preferences.

In 1952 a "standstill" agreement was negotiated with the USA whereby Britain and the Commonwealth agreed not to introduce new preferences

⁶¹ INCH, PV 4 (Eric Louw Collection), File No. 72 (Articles and Manuscripts), No. 5., "Government Policy and Economic Development in South Africa", 1953.

⁶² Ibid., p.3.

⁶³ Ibid., No.6, "The SA Economy and Some Aspects of the South African Economic Policy", August 1953, pp.3-4.

but would continue to retain the old ones.⁶⁴ This, as Miller points out, was "most convenient for all concerned" because "new preferences may have prejudiced advantages elsewhere but old preferences needed to be retained because there was not enough prospect of alternative markets".⁶⁵ For South Africa the guaranteed market provided by Britain for wines and fruit was politically important as it represented rural interests with much say in the government of the country (as was the case in Australia and New Zealand) but the extension of preferences could have prejudiced the ability of South Africa, Australia and to a lesser extent, New Zealand, to sell more freely in world markets such as the USA, Japan and Germany.⁶⁶

In any case, as Miller points out, the Commonwealth was increasingly unable to maintain itself as a "closed system" for economic purposes and by the mid-1950's "no future efforts were planned to confine Commonwealth resources to Commonwealth needs".⁶⁷ 1952 was, according to him, the turning point, when the Commonwealth finance minister's conference in London announced that it was in favour of multi-lateralism. This coincided with the steadily increasing convertibility of sterling as a result of increased US spending on imports, a relaxation of tariffs world-wide, a revival of the European and Japanese economies and the diversification of trade.

An indication of the British view of South Africa's role in the sterling area during Malan's period is given in some of the cabinet memoranda and discussions of economic policy in those years. In 1949, for example, a British cabinet memorandum on the meeting of Commonwealth finance ministers in July commented on the "identity of views" which was eventually reached even on matters regarded as

⁶⁴ Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, pp.218-219.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.219.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.218.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.222.

necessary for "immediate action" such as cuts in dollar imports.⁶⁸ It was noted that the Canadians had "naturally" dissociated themselves from the recommendations regarding dollar import cuts and that the South Africans, not being members of the sterling area dollar pool, "were in a different position from the rest". All the dominions had, however, appreciated the need for "drastic action immediately" and for a "constructive approach" to the long-term problem. "There was a unanimous determination to do whatever was possible to maintain the strength of the sterling area".⁶⁹

In 1952 a report by the Commonwealth relations office to all British high commissioners in the dominions on the London finance ministers' conference noted that South Africa undertook to do everything to "hit her target" of a balance of payments surplus with the non-sterling world and that she had made "very forthcoming" proposals concerning gold which represented "a major contribution on her part to strengthen the central reserves".⁷⁰ It also noted that the South African finance minister, Havenga, had made "helpful speeches" on the conference after his return. On the question of the development of Commonwealth resources, the South African delegate was "at pains" to oppose restraints on the movement of private capital from Britain to South Africa and had given "useful accounts" of South Africa's success in obtaining overseas capital.⁷¹

Liesching, at the CRO, noted in a separate letter to the British high commissioner in Cape Town, Sir John Le Rougetel, that South Africa was represented at the finance ministers' conference by the

⁶⁸ PRO, CAB 129/36, C.P.(49)160, "Meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers", Memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade, Mr Harold Wilson, 21 July 1949.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ PRO, DO 35, File 2668 (Commonwealth Finance Ministers Conference January 1952), Report to United Kingdom High Commissioners, No.8, Results of Commonwealth Conference.

⁷¹ Ibid.

"wise and experienced Mr Havenga".⁷² He commented further that as a non-sterling pool member South Africa could easily have taken the Canadian line that "others must make the sacrifices". Yet in the end, Havenga, together with the Indians, "proved to be the most willing of all the other Commonwealth Ministers to help weather the immediate crisis".

In parliament, the government was attacked for not doing enough to help the sterling area through its crisis of 1952 and for a statement by Havenga that South Africa was "not irrevocably tied to sterling".⁷³ The UP Member for Vasco claimed that Havenga had "lost the big chance" to help the sterling area and did not have the "vision" with regard to the future role which sterling would play in the "development of the country".⁷⁴

A National Party spokesman (Dr N. Diederichs) answered this criticism by saying that South Africa was "doing all it could" to aid sterling but that "help must not come from one side only".⁷⁵ He claimed that "Britain was not delivering the good business" needed in South Africa "fast enough" nor "at a competitive price compared to elsewhere".⁷⁶ However, Britain was herself expressing gratitude for what was done in the latest budget, he said (referring to the advance sale of £10m of gold from the reserves, cuts in imports from Europe and greater opportunities for British exporters in terms of South African import licences).⁷⁷ Havenga then joined in the debate and added that he was doing even more for sterling than was indicated in the budget but that "sooner or later the question will be put whether it is in the interests of South Africa to make those

⁷² Ibid., No.10, Liesching - Le Rougetel, 27 February 1952.

⁷³ House of Assembly Debates, col.8156, 14 June 1952.

⁷⁴ Ibid., col.8311, 17 June 1952.

⁷⁵ Ibid., col.8324, 17 June 1952.

⁷⁶ Ibid., col.8325, 17 June 1952.

⁷⁷ Ibid., col.8326, 17 June 1952.

sacrifices which we are making".⁷⁸

Clearly, however, the bickering between government and opposition over the degree of help given to sterling in 1952 was overshadowed by the amount of agreement between them on the question of Commonwealth co-operation in the economic field. As had been the case in questions of a military nature the realities of the post-war international order intruded into the party-political debate and forced both sides to modify their ideological stand-points on economic matters.

⁷⁸ Ibid., cols 8372-3, 17 June 1952.

**PART THREE: THE STRIJDOM YEARS 1954-
1958**

Introduction

Strijdom's premiership was not marked by any dramatic moves to break ties with the Commonwealth. This was partly because of the 1951 compromise over Commonwealth membership, which Strijdom had agreed to and which separated the republican issue from the Commonwealth issue, at least temporarily. But it also reflected the fact that overwhelming economic, strategic and political considerations made the necessity apparent to Strijdom, as it had to Malan, of retaining Commonwealth ties in a period of international uncertainty and increasing South African isolation.

There was also the need to retain some degree of English-speaking support and a display of white unity in the face of local and foreign hostility to apartheid. Thus there would have been no point to a policy of deliberately antagonising English-speakers by breaking Commonwealth ties at such an early period in the Nationalist programme. Instead, to assuage feelings that not enough was being done, there was a continuation of the campaign by the Nationalist Party to whittle away at the symbols of the British connection (such as the flag and anthem) and to prepare the public for what was seen as the inevitability of the republic.

Other major developments in South Africa's foreign policy in general or in Commonwealth policy in particular during Strijdom's period were few.¹ Nevertheless, the effects of South Africa's domestic policies on her international relations in general and her Commonwealth relations in particular continued to be felt in terms of differing black and white perceptions of the Commonwealth and the British connection during Strijdom's period. Furthermore, certain events or policy initiatives had some dramatic reverberations on public opinion. The Suez crisis was particularly important in this regard, as was the changing official attitude to decolonisation.

The Suez crisis of November 1956 was an earthshaking event for

¹ Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.21.

Britain and the Commonwealth with major implications for the future course of Commonwealth relations. It left a trail of distrust and uncertainty in many countries, including South Africa, about British commitment to the Commonwealth. In practice, it did not mark a departure for Strijdom's government from the already guarded and cautiously non-committal approach to Commonwealth relations adopted previously by Malan.²

Nevertheless, the disastrous consequences of the Suez debacle in Nationalist eyes seemed to vindicate this "hands-off" policy and appeared to demonstrate the folly of becoming involved in Britain's wars. By keeping his head "out of the beehive" as he called it, Strijdom limited the "fall-out" for South Africa (which in any case benefited economically, both in the short-term and the long-term, from the temporary closure of the Suez Canal which had caused insecurity in Europe about its future use). Officially, relations with Britain were not adversely affected to any degree beyond an initially angry exchange between Eric Louw and the British high commissioner, Sir Percival Liesching, over the lack of Commonwealth consultation by the British government.³ Unofficially, however, it marked a sea-change in public attitudes in South Africa towards Britain and the Commonwealth that had the effect of weakening the Commonwealth connection.

Other than Suez the only important development, which related more to British-South African relations than the Commonwealth in general, was the Simonstown Agreement of July 1955.⁴ This was significant in that it marked the culmination of South African attempts to involve a major power in defence of the southern African region and indicated that South Africa's racial policies were not yet an overwhelming consideration in British strategic planning. As a

² The Suez crisis and its implications for South Africa's Commonwealth relations is discussed more fully in Chapter 13.

³ James Eayrs (ed.), The Commonwealth and Suez. A Documentary Survey (London, OUP, 1964), p.190.

⁴ See chapter 11, pp.234-248.

demonstration of Nationalist commitment to the Commonwealth it was not significant to any extent. It was, rather, an assertion of South African nationalism against one of the last remaining symbols of British sovereignty, the Simonstown naval base. As such it represented the ongoing Nationalist campaign against British symbols in South Africa such as the national anthem, the flag and also British control of the high commission territories. In all these matters Strijdom's government was following a path already laid out for it by Malan.

The relationship between Britain and South Africa during Strijdom's premiership continued to be marked, as we shall see, by a degree of distance and formality. However, economic, strategic and political necessities dictated a close working relationship between the two countries. This relationship continued to be characterised more by British appeasement of South Africa than the reverse, as the chapter on the Simonstown Agreement should indicate. On issues such as the transfer of the high commission territories and South African access to them for defence purposes, the governments of Churchill (despite some reluctance expressed by the prime minister himself over Simonstown), Eden and Macmillan continued to adopt a mollifying attitude which aimed at ensuring South African co-operation in key areas of Commonwealth concern. One of these areas was British decolonisation policy. The shift in the Nationalist attitude to independent African states during Strijdom's premiership came as a pleasant surprise to the British who continued, however, to show their eagerness to consult South Africa before embarking on major policy initiatives concerning decolonisation in Africa.

Strijdom's inexperience in foreign affairs, his ill-health and the lack of any new major developments in South Africa's foreign relations meant that he of all Nationalist prime ministers up to 1961 "left the smallest imprint on foreign policy".⁵ He did not engage much in personal diplomacy, unlike his predecessors, and was content to leave much of the business to Eric Louw, who shared

⁵ Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.21.

Strijdom's views on republicanism, the Commonwealth and UNO. The demands of premiership, Strijdom said, made it "impractical" for him to do justice to any other cabinet portfolio.⁶ Thus, the prickly and often tactless Eric Louw was given more or less of a free hand, much to the dismay of the parliamentary opposition and British policy-makers who had to deal with him. (Even some in his own party were not happy with his strident style, as was evident in the occasionally critical columns in Die Burger).

Strijdom's only official visit abroad was to attend the 1956 Commonwealth prime ministers' conference in London, where his public defence of apartheid and his half-hearted attempt to pursue the issue of incorporation of the high commission territories with his British counterparts left him with few admirers. In a period of growing hostility to South Africa in the UNO and with increasing preoccupations at home Strijdom (and to an extent, his successor, Verwoerd) could not engage in the sort of high profile diplomacy of a Smuts or even of a Malan. The Simonstown negotiations were left largely to the defence minister, F.C. Erasmus, and the implementation of the changing Africa policy, to Eric Louw.⁷

Eric Louw, who as minister of external affairs embarked upon a reorganisation of the Africa section in 1955 in order to improve contacts with other African territories, began a process of policy formation in regard to Africa that had important consequences for South Africa's external relations in the long term. Abandoning Malan's reluctance to accept independent African states in the Commonwealth or out of it, he redefined policy in such a way as to accept the inevitability of the decline of colonialism and the need to deal with independent African states on equal terms.

The implications of this change in policy were numerous. In domestic terms it demonstrated a convergence of policy concerning the "homelands" culminating in the Promotion of Bantu Self-government

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See chapters 11 and 12.

Act of 1959. In wider terms it removed a potential source of tension between Britain and South Africa over the admission of African colonies to full membership of the "club" and was dramatically evidenced by the cordial exchanges between Louw and Nkrumah on the eve of Ghana's independence. However, the implications of diplomatic recognition in terms of practical arrangements at home for the hosting of black diplomats soon proved to be source of embarrassment for Strijdom's government and the problem was not resolved during his premiership.

Developments in black politics during the mid-fifties left their imprint on attitudes to the Commonwealth and the British connection. The tensions within the main African political movement, the ANC, in these years were not often reflected in its resolutions on foreign affairs. These retained a uniformly anti-imperialist tone in general and continued to be influenced by the rhetoric of left-wing politics.⁸ In 1955 the ANC supported the Bandung Conference and the adoption of a non-aligned stance in world affairs. This attitude was, however, quite consistent with the pro-Soviet stance of the South African Communist Party, one of the Congress Alliance members.

By the mid 1950s it had become apparent to the Soviet Union that the rigid classification of the world into two implacably antagonistic camps, the "anti-imperialist democratic" and the "imperialist anti-democratic" camps (the so-called Zhdanovite perspective adopted during Cold-war tensions of 1947), had not resulted in an increase in communist influence in the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent countries.⁹ Accordingly, a new strategy towards socialist transformation in the colonies and ex-colonies (South Africa being seen as a colonial country of a "special type"), was adopted based on the concept of "national democracy".¹⁰

⁸ G.M. Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa. The Evolution of an Ideology (UCLA Press, Los Angeles, 1979), p.119.

⁹ Peter Hudson, "The Freedom Charter and the theory of National Democratic Revolution", Transformation (1), 1986, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.14.

This concept involved the legitimisation of an independence struggle by means of a "national-democratic" revolution in which the bourgeois would be in alliance with the proletariat and peasantry against the forces of imperialism. Experience had demonstrated that newly independent countries were often dominated by national bourgeoisies and that their quest for independence and non-alignment was more than just rhetoric. Many of them adopted far-reaching social and economic reforms. The theory of the "Two Camps" was therefore seen as inconsistent with developments in the underdeveloped world and also as "unfruitful both for the Soviet Union and for numerous communist parties in underdeveloped countries."¹¹

The adoption of the Freedom Charter in Kliptown by the Congress of the People in 1955 and later endorsed by the ANC was interpreted in marxist circles as being in conformity with the concept of national-democratic revolution.¹² But it is doubtful whether the Charter had revolutionary implications (as the South African government assumed at the time) and even whether the ANC could be described as a revolutionary movement in the mid 1950s.¹³

The divisions between Charterist, Workerist and Africanist viewpoints within the ANC became increasingly apparent during and after the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 and culminated in the establishment of an openly Africanist group that eventually split from the ANC to form the Pan-Africanist Congress in 1959. While Africanist and Charterists were united in their desire to see a free Africa emerge from colonial rule they were not at one in their views of the roles of whites, coloureds and Asians in a future people's republic nor in their attitude to Strijdom's diplomatic manoeuvres concerning independent African states. This reflected, partly, the division between the older and younger generations in African politics, the latter fired with impatient enthusiasm for the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Hudson, pp.6-10 and Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, pp. 70-74.

¹³ Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, p.73.

slogan of "Africa for the Africans" and scornful of the leadership's cautious and moderate acceptance of white liberals and other political allies.¹⁴

At the 1954 ANC annual congress in Durban the Natal Indian Congress president, G.M Naicker, referred obliquely to the Africanist agenda when he congratulated the leadership of the ANC for "choosing the path of democracy" and not allowing the movement for national liberation to become "reactionary in character....as was the case with Afrikaner Nationalism".¹⁵ The slogan of the ANC, he said, was not "South Africa for the Africans", but "South Africa for all her peoples of all creeds and nationalities". Chief Luthuli, president of the ANC, had stressed also in his opening address to the conference "that while the African National Congress must naturally work for its own growth it is equally committed to the policy of forming a multi-racial united Democratic front to challenge the forces of reaction in this country".¹⁶

However, the uncompromisingly strong rejection of colonialism continued to be seen in Congress resolutions and reports. At the national conference of 1957, for example, the report of the National Executive Committee noted how the rise of independent states in Asia and Africa "had inspired the struggling peoples of Africa and Asia andshattered ...the myth of the inherent inferiority of the colonial peoples and their helpless dependence on the colonisers".¹⁷ The year 1957 had seen "the birth of the first independent African state freed directly from British imperialism," the emergence of Ghana which "had a profound effect on the racist theories of our Nationalist government".

¹⁴ Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa, p.168.

¹⁵ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), B (a)3, Annual Report of the National Executive Committee to the 42nd Annual Congress, Durban 16-19 December 1954, Address by G.M. Naicker, p.4.

¹⁶ Ibid., Presidential Address by Chief Albert Luthuli, pp.3-4.

¹⁷ AD 2186, B a 4. (45th Annual Conference , Orlando 1957), Report of the National Executive Committee, pp.1-5.

The 1957 report went on to condemn what it called the "disgraceful act of aggression" by Britain and France in Suez the previous year and also American interference in the Middle East under the cloak of the Eisenhower Doctrine.¹⁸ In the light of Soviet foreign policy at the time, which supported and encouraged non-alignment in the newly independent countries,¹⁹ and in the light of the South African Communist Party's influence on the Congress Alliance's policy formation at that time,²⁰ it is not surprising that the ANC demonstrated such support for Egypt.

In fact, as we shall see in a later chapter, the Suez crisis had marked something of a watershed in South African black attitudes to Britain and the Commonwealth. It revealed a disillusionment that went beyond mere verbal condemnations of the British and French actions. The Suez invasion was seen as another example of how Britain was breaking faith with the Commonwealth ideal of peaceful co-operation and non-racialism.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hudson, "The Freedom Charter and the Theory of National Democratic Revolution", p.14.

²⁰ Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, p.28.

²¹ See for example the editorial in the World (formerly Bantu World) of 17 November 1956 which stated that "In the minds of Africans...Britain had done herself irreparable harm. She has lost her prestige among Afro-Asian people and nations...they no longer are for Britain".

Chapter 10: Strijdom and the Republican Ideal 1954-58

(a) Strijdom's early and later republican strategies

It is a little ironic that J.G. Strijdom, the arch-republican and open advocate of secession from the Commonwealth, should have been in London on a private visit during the crisis in Nationalist ranks that occurred after D.F. Malan's announcement of imminent retirement in October 1954. From a hotel in Marble Arch, close to the centre of the empire he detested so much, he wrote to his closest cabinet colleague and confidant, H.F. Verwoerd, minister of native affairs, and plotted a minor "palace coup" against his rivals for the premiership within the ranks of the Nationalist caucus.¹

Foremost amongst the contenders for the position was N.C. Havenga, Malan's own choice as his successor, the minister of finance and one-time leader of the Afrikaner Party who had helped the Nationalists gain power in 1948. But Havenga had compromised himself and the party in the eyes of Strijdom supporters because of his relatively moderate stance on the question of tactics in relation to the abolition of the coloured vote. As Strijdom put it, he could have voted for Havenga as Malan's successor "up to two years ago" because of all he had done for "our cause" ("ons saak") up to that point.² But since the "difference of opinion" ("meningsverskil") between himself and Malan/Havenga on the coloured vote and sovereignty of parliament issues, his ideas had changed.

He believed Malan and Havenga should have stuck by the 1952 caucus decision to affirm parliamentary sovereignty over the law courts in the coloured franchise issue and instead felt they had greatly damaged the party by trying the constitutional method of achieving a two-thirds majority in parliament. But this was not all they disagreed upon because the sovereignty of parliament principle had

¹ INCH, PV93 (Verwoerd Collection), Vol.1, (Onderwerpsleers), File 1/11/1 (1954 Oct-Nov: Eerste Minister se Verkiesing), Strijdom - Verwoerd 17, October 1954.

² Ibid.

a bearing on the republican issue and thus on the question of South Africa's continued adherence to the Commonwealth.

It was Havenga who had insisted that any decision on a republic should not be adopted by a bare parliamentary majority but rather by an expression of the people's will through a referendum. While Strijdom had accepted this for tactical reasons he had always argued that Nationalist policy was to institute a republic and leave the Commonwealth at the same time. Malan and Havenga, however, insisted that the two issues be treated separately and at the 1951 caucus meeting Malan had warned the party about a split on this issue by arguing that it could give the United Party opposition the opportunity to "drive a wedge between us" ("'n wig tussen ons in te drywe").³ He rebutted Strijdom's attack on him and his demand for immediate withdrawal from the Commonwealth with the words:

My standpoint is that if we do not want to be isolated we should choose co-operation with the Commonwealth. If we do not have a good reason to get out of the Commonwealth then we must stay in..⁴

He went on to say in a more placatory manner that the coloured vote issue was pertinent to the republican issue in that it was based on the standpoint that the Union was a "sovereign and independent state" and could change her constitution "as she liked". Staying in the Commonwealth "made no difference in the slightest to this position of independence".

Strijdom, who reluctantly accepted the compromise caucus decision of 1951 to treat the republican and Commonwealth issues separately, continued in private to berate Malan for his stance on Commonwealth

³ INCH, PV4 (Eric Louw Collection), File No. 93 (1951: Republikeinse Beleid, Koukus Besprekings), Dept. Commerce and Industry, "Subject: Private, Republican Policy, Caucus Meeting 13 March 1951", pp.1-4.

⁴ Ibid., Caucus Meeting 20 March 1951, p.1.

membership. In January 1952 he wrote to Malan saying he was surprised to see (in a recent Foreign Affairs department publication) that Malan was satisfied with the 1949 position on Commonwealth membership "despite our important principles" and "your promises" in parliament.⁵ He appealed to Malan to change his attitude, saying the NP could not afford a split on this "after all we have been through". The caucus decision of April 1951, he said, had stated the NP should accept that South Africa was now free to break away from the Commonwealth "and have freedom" and that the republic and Commonwealth membership were separate issues to be decided separately.

In the same letter Strijdom complained that he had just learnt in the newspapers about the Commonwealth finance ministers conference "and the attendance of Paul Sauer [minister of transport] at the meeting".⁶ This was "obviously an important conference" but he did not know what Sauer would "bind us to accept there". Thus he found himself in an "unpleasant situation" as leader of the Party in Transvaal and as a government member. He had also learnt in newspapers that South Africa was "satisfied" with the title of "High Commissioner" instead of "ambassador" for South African representatives in Commonwealth countries. His feeling was "we should have ordinary titles for them because the British want to maintain 'High Commissioner' so as not to admit the divisibility of the Crown".⁷ That, he continued, was another example of how he had learnt in newspapers about such decisions.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Strijdom and his supporters should have been anxious to secure the premiership when the opportunity arose with Malan's resignation announcement in October 1954. Malan had warned the party soon after his announced retirement not to form groups or to listen to those who would try to exclude the

⁵ TA, A2 (Strijdom Collection), Vol.2 (Correspondence: Party Political), File No.40 (Federal Council of Nationalist Party: 1935 July 5 - 1958 May 2), Strijdom - Malan, 10 January 1952. p.62.

⁶ Ibid., p.56.

⁷ Ibid., p.59.

English-speaking South Africans by setting up a purely Afrikaans republic.⁸ This veiled reference to the Strijdom faction indicated his fears of a forthcoming leadership struggle. The caucus met on 30 November and nominated both Havenga and Strijdom, the latter in absentia and on his way back from Europe. It soon became clear, however, that Verwoerd and Strijdom had outmanoeuvred the Havenga group and when Havenga realised that his chances of election were slim, he stood down. Strijdom was elected unanimously in absentia.

As Walker described it, this "symbolic victory of the North over the South" (Transvaal vs. Cape) in South African Nationalist politics was attended by crowds brandishing the Vierkleur and singing the republican Volkslied around Kruger's statue in Church Square.⁹ The historian, D.W. Krüger, noted that in English opposition circles fears arose that "things were going to happen now and that moderation and caution in politics would be thrown overboard".¹⁰

Seeming to confirm this Strijdom immediately reshuffled his cabinet in a way which resulted in a strengthening of the republican element and the "no compromise" group on racial policy.¹¹ For the first time since Union the prime minister took no portfolio for himself and instead gave external affairs (traditionally linked to the prime minister's office) to Eric Louw. As a strong supporter of Strijdom, Louw was also rewarded with the finance post which he inherited from Havenga. Paul Sauer, a Havenga man, was demoted from transport to lands. Verwoerd kept native affairs and "was henceforth very much in the forefront of the Party's councils",¹² becoming Strijdom's right-hand man in cabinet. Jan de Klerk, Transvaal secretary of the party and one of Strijdom's brothers-in-law, replaced B.J. Schoeman as Labour minister and received senatorial rank.

⁸ Walker, A History of Southern Africa, p.922.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Krüger, The Making of a Nation, p.288.

¹¹ Ibid., p.289.

¹² Ibid.

This transfer of the balance of power in government to the "extremists" was not, however, immediately apparent in the field of foreign relations policy and Commonwealth relations in particular. As Krüger puts it, the new prime minister "was careful to strike the right moderate note"¹³ from the beginning. He promised there would be no immediate move towards the creation of a republic, at least during the lifetime of the present parliament and that when the change was made it would only be after a plebiscite or special general election. Only then would the party decide whether or not the republic should remain within the Commonwealth. Other "assurances" were that there would be no anti-British immigration policies, that equal language rights would continue and a promise to the whites that no Indian or "Bantu" need look to him for votes.¹⁴ The policy of apartheid would be followed to the end.

Soon after coming to power Strijdom assured his party supporters in a speech at Bloemhof that "when an adequate majority wants a Republic it must come to pass".¹⁵ However, he had promised English supporters earlier that such a republic would not be introduced during the lifetime of the present parliament. Thus it was hardly surprising that a measure of impatience in Nationalist circles with the lack of movement towards a republic came to the fore by the time of the third Nationalist election victory of 1958. Correspondence between the young P.W. Botha and Strijdom in May of that year revealed how the demands of leadership had toned down Strijdom's republican rhetoric.

Impatient at the lack of progress towards the republic, Botha wrote to Strijdom indicating his intention to ask a question in parliament about when and how the republic would be introduced.¹⁶ He asked Strijdom to have a thorough discussion at the beginning of the new

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Walker, A History of Southern Africa, p.924.

¹⁵ Commonwealth Survey, (1954), 1(a) Constitutional and Political, "South Africa: Policy of new Strijdom Government", 22 December 1954.

¹⁶ TA, A2 (Strijdom), 1 (Correspondence), Vol.54 (Republican Struggle 4 Sept.1952 - 17 June 1958), P.W. Botha - J.G. Strijdom, 29 May 1958, p.119.

parliamentary sitting concerning the republic and suggested putting forward a motion to the effect that:

The Council brings to the attention of the Government the growing feeling ["groeierende gevoel"] of the South African electorate in favour of a Republican state. Furthermore the Council requests the Government to turn its attention ["om sy aandag...te skenk"] towards creating a Republic in South Africa.¹⁷

Strijdom's reply indicated the extent to which the realities of premiership had modified his earlier ardour about such things. He said to Botha that the republic was in the party's programme of principles and that he had emphasized it many times.¹⁸ "No Nationalist could doubt our determination over a republic", he said, but if the sort of motion proposed by Botha were to be introduced it would give the opposition "a huge weapon". It would show that "we the government are not aware of the growing republican feeling and that we were not serious about it". He had discussed it with the cabinet who agreed with him and he hoped Botha would not take the matter further.

That, however, was not the end of the matter, for Botha replied on 11 June to the effect that he appreciated Strijdom's reservations but was himself not tied to the wording of such a motion.¹⁹ He claimed the time was now ripe for a republic and exactly how it was to be introduced and whether it was to be in the Commonwealth or not should be stated. Would the decision on Commonwealth membership, he asked, be given to a vote in parliament or only the cabinet? He would consider a new motion to thank the government for the steps it had taken on the way to a republic and would ask the government to take practical steps to prepare the white voters for a republic.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., Strijdom - Botha, 5 June 1958, p.121.

¹⁹ Ibid., Botha - Strijdom, 11 June 1958, p.129.

Again Strijdom replied, this time on 17 June, to the effect that the time was still not ripe for such a government declaration and that other steps had to be announced first.²⁰ It could not happen yet because "it could do damage" and a declaration now over the 1949 question of whether it should be a republic in or out of the Commonwealth "would reopen old wounds and splits in the party".

Strijdom's reluctance to move quickly on these issues was also, of course, conditioned by the fact that in the general elections of April 1958 the Nationalists had still not achieved an overall majority of votes cast. Round Table commented at the time that it was only because of "emigration, ...the removal of 50,000 coloured voters from the roll in 1956... and the overloading of constituencies" that the April election victory of 103 seats to 53 had been achieved.²¹ Support for the Nationalists was growing, however, and the electoral system continued to favour them as it had in 1953 and 1948. What was still uncertain was whether the republicans would win a referendum vote. Even with the passing of Act 30 of 1958 which enfranchised 18-year-olds, Strijdom could not risk a hasty decision. It would be left to his successor, H.F. Verwoerd, to plan for a republican victory in circumstances very different to those in 1958.

In London in 1956 Strijdom had raised the question of a republic in the course of a speech at the South African Club. He had claimed that under a republican form of government "the majority of our people, namely the Afrikaans-speaking section" would be "infinitely more willing to co-operate with Great Britain and other Commonwealth countries than they would be under present circumstances".²² He was also reported to have said that South Africa and other countries only remained in the Commonwealth "as long as it is in their interests to remain".

These statements, claimed one opposition newspaper, the Eastern

²⁰ Ibid., Strijdom - Botha, 17 June 1958, p.132.

²¹ "South Africa: General Election", Round Table, Vol.48 (1957-58), pp.297-299.

²² Eastern Province Herald, 27 June 1956.

Province Herald, were "cynical" and "not calculated to win friends at the Prime Ministers Conference". Strijdom had ignored the fact that the "real majority in the country were non-Europeans" and that such a statement would not go down well in a "multi-racial Commonwealth". However, The Star and Rand Daily Mail were more favourable in their reactions to Strijdom's speech and his actions at the conference. The former congratulated him for showing a "straightforward and uncomplaining approach that was calculated to touch the cricketer in every Englishman".²³ The latter wondered how long South Africa could remain a member of the Club in the face of criticism by other Commonwealth members.²⁴ Strijdom's "probable dilemma" (of racism,) was that "the Commonwealth asks him to practise what he dare not preach".

In October 1956, after a heated parliamentary debate on the question of Natal's position in a future republic (Heaton-Nicholls had argued for a separate referendum in Natal to determine whether it should secede or not), Ilanga Lase Natal expressed the views of the excluded majority in the debate. Under the heading "Natal and Africans" it said that Africans were asking, "what do the Nationalists lack today which they can only obtain through a republic?"²⁵ South Africa was a "powerful independent state", it argued, with its own legislature. No other country, including Britain, could dictate to South Africa what course to follow. But what Africans were asking was, would the republic "bring us the freedom and independence which the Nationalists already enjoy", or would it "enslave us still more?" Africans were "puzzled and concerned" over the cry for a republic and "present political trends" afforded little hope of improved conditions for them.

(b) British -South African relations

At the 1956 prime ministers conference white South African public opinion had been shocked at pictures of demonstrators dogging

²³ The Star, 26 July 1956.

²⁴ Rand Daily Mail, 3 July 1956.

²⁵ Ilanga Lase Natal, 13 October 1956.

Strijdom's footsteps. This was the first time such anti-apartheid demonstrations had been seen at a prime minister's conference. Prominent Labour Party politicians like Fenner Brockway and Anthony Wedgewood Benn made speeches denouncing apartheid and prompted angry retorts about Labour Party interference in South African affairs.²⁶ Dr J.H.O. du Plessis (NP Stellenbosch) noted in the 1957 parliamentary session that these demonstrations and other statements by Labour politicians such as Aneurin Bevan (who had remarked that he "would enjoy seeing Strijdom sit next to Nkrumah at a Commonwealth Conference"), were to the "detriment of British relations with South Africa".²⁷

Eric Louw wrote a prickly letter to the London Times in January 1957 objecting to a proposed visit by British jurors to the Treason Trial. He threatened that South Africa could withdraw from the Commonwealth if such interference in South Africa's affairs were to become endemic.²⁸ This letter caused a minor political storm in South Africa with the opposition United Party criticising Louw for a "thoroughly badly-drafted, irresponsible and clumsy document ...calculated to do far more harm than good to our foreign relations".²⁹ He was accused of being a disciple of "knobkerrie [sic] diplomacy", for antagonising Britain unnecessarily and for being ham-handed in his attempts to retaliate against Indian trade sanctions after the closure of the Suez Canal.³⁰

British official views of Strijdom's government were hesitant and reactive. An indication of contemporary British thinking about Strijdom and the relationship with Britain after his accession to power in 1954 is given in some of the dominions office files for the period. It has been noted in previous chapters that in Malan's period, British officials such as the high commissioner, Evelyn

²⁶ Die Vaderland, 3 July 1956.

²⁷ House of Assembly Debates, cols 7626-7, 10 June 1957.

²⁸ The Times , 7 January 1957.

²⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.568, 4 February 1957.

³⁰ Ibid., col.571, 4 February 1957.

Baring, had expressed alarm at the possibility of an "extremist" like Strijdom coming to power in South Africa: that unless Britain made concessions on issues such as the Seretse Affair and the high commission territories the moderates would be swept from power and the extreme republicans would declare a republic and secede from the Commonwealth.³¹ But as these fears receded and it became clear that no hasty moves in that direction were planned the Conservative governments of Churchill, Eden and Macmillan settled into an uneasy working relationship with Strijdom.

Issues such as the incorporation of the high commission territories, the Simonstown agreement, the status of high commissioners and economic co-operation were matters of negotiation between the two governments conducted in a formal and rather less than friendly manner but which the British were already accustomed to from Malan's period. At the UNO Britain and the other "white" Commonwealth countries continued to shield South Africa from anti-apartheid criticism as the price demanded for South Africa's continued co-operation in the Commonwealth. But on the surface, there was little in the mid- 1950's to disturb the relationship between South Africa and Britain besides occasional pinpricks such as anti-apartheid demonstrations and Eric Louw's public indiscretions.

In 1955 a report was sent by the Commonwealth relations office (CRO) to the British high commissioner in Cape Town, Sir Percival Liesching, about talks which took place between CRO officials in London and South Africa's high commissioner, G.H. Jooste. Jooste had reportedly expressed "regret" that Strijdom had not met anyone in the British government or in the CRO before taking office in November 1954.³² That, said Jooste, had been for health reasons and because of a desire to avoid publicity when he was then in London. However, Jooste expressed the hope that British ministers would take the initiative themselves to visit South Africa and not wait for invitations. He said he was satisfied with the Simonstown

³¹ See for example chapter 5, pp.99-104.

³² PRO, DO 119, File 1177 (Union of South Africa/United Kingdom Relations, 1955), G. Laithwaite (CRO) to P. Liesching, High Commissioner, Cape Town, 11 August 1955.

negotiations but felt that both sides should "avoid commitments" at first and build up trust. He also stated that even though the majority of whites were Afrikaners of German or Dutch descent South Africa would be more likely to turn to Britain if she left the Commonwealth, rather than stand alone.

Behind the scenes he was doing his best, Jooste said, to bring about a "better understanding" between the two countries and he accepted the importance of not antagonizing public opinion and the press. He claimed that many South Africans were shifting money from the UK to the USA or Switzerland because of "bad feelings in the UK towards South Africa". But he was telling people not to be foolish and not to allow their conduct to be ruled by "uninformed press reactions" in Britain. He denied there was any hostility on the part of the South African government to "British South Africans".

Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the secretary of state for Commonwealth relations (also referred to as Lord Home), in a separate meeting with Jooste on 26 July had made certain remarks in relation to British-South African relations that reportedly "made an impact" on Eric Louw.³³ Home had insisted that better relations between South Africa and the UK could only come about by "going carefully and slowly" - remarks clearly aimed at Louw's brand of diplomacy. Jooste had then asked Home whether the people of the UK really wanted to be friendly and to co-operate with South Africa and if so, would the "Native Policy" in South Africa bring about a change. Home had answered "yes" to both questions but had added that "we must all try to see that it did not happen".

It was of course in the interests of both sides not to disturb the relationship too much. Britain needed South Africa as much as South Africa needed Britain. Britain's share of South Africa's trade remained as important as before³⁴ and there were too many mutual economic, strategic and social bonds between them to allow either side to make a radical break with the past. The republican issue and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See chapter 13, pp.300-308.

the possibility of secession from the Commonwealth, while still matters for concern, had diminished in urgency given the reassuring noises from Strijdom's government.

The Commonwealth was, as one writer has noted, "a congenial place" for South Africa in the mid-fifties.³⁵ It did not bar republics but was still associated with the monarchical symbols which the English South Africans valued. It was a "possible way in to the Western defence system and the economic preferences still remained important for certain industries. India's criticisms were still voiced outside official Commonwealth forums and the fears about admitting independent African states had temporarily subsided with the implementation of the new Africa policy. In all it remained a far better bet in Nationalist eyes than the UNO, where, as Miller notes, South Africa retained, in protest, only a token membership after 1956³⁶ (South African officials refused to take up their official seat in the General Assembly except in exceptional circumstance such as when Article 2(7) was at issue).³⁷

As has been noted, Eric Louw occasionally ruffled feathers at the Commonwealth relations office. This was evidenced, for example, by his statements in 1956 concerning the title of "minister of external affairs". An article in the Cape Times had prompted Louw to bring up the subject. The article, written in a conciliatory, if not quite appeasing tone, suggested that now Louw had taken over as minister of external affairs with "whole-time responsibility" the time was ripe to consider the change from minister of "External Affairs" to minister of "Foreign Affairs".³⁸ South Africa, said the editor, was "one of the few nations of the world" which referred to the political head of the department as the "Minister of External Affairs".

Liesching, the British high commissioner, then learnt from the ex-secretary of external affairs, D.D. Forsyth, that Louw had

³⁵ Miller, Survey, p.132.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.52.

³⁸ Cape Times, 16 August 1956.

immediately seen the advantage in this article for the republican cause and had contacted him about it. This

gave fresh evidence of the way Louw's mind worked in trying to get rid of the nomenclature marking the distinction which should be drawn between the relations between members of the Commonwealth and those that exist between any of them and a foreign country, or between foreign countries themselves.³⁹

It reminded Liesching of Louw's "suppressed desire" at a recent prime minister's meeting to change the title of high commissioner to ambassador. Other evidence was the change in the position of deputy high commissioner to "Minister Counsellor".⁴⁰

Now Louw had wanted to get Forsyth's support "as an ex-civil servant of great standing, authority and impartiality", to pave the way for the change in the title of minister of external affairs. He wanted Forsyth to write to the Cape Times or any other newspaper in support of the change. Clearly Forsyth had disliked both the proposed method and the change and had asked Liesching's opinion about it. Liesching had told Forsyth that he considered Commonwealth relations to be different in kind from relations between a Commonwealth member and a foreign country and that "this to me was a principle that should at all costs be sustained. Anything which whittled it away by change in nomenclature should be resisted". The term minister of foreign affairs was also not in use in any Commonwealth country except Pakistan where it was coupled with Commonwealth relations. In the United Kingdom there was separation of the portfolios and the UK still referred to Ireland as "non-foreign" in parliament.

Forsyth "had agreed with all this" and had said to Liesching that he would refuse to support the Cape Times article. In conclusion Liesching indicated his irritation with the editor of the above-

³⁹ PRO, DO 119, File 1185 (1956: Proposal to alter title of Minister of External Affairs), Liesching (Cape Town) - Laithwaite (CRO) 25 August 1956.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

mentioned paper by saying:

I cannot think why the editor of the Cape Times, Victor Norton, ...can have lent himself to this idea. He has, of course, got a very immature mind. I only wish he was within reach so that I could have a talk to him myself.⁴¹

The matter rested there until it was brought up again in June 1957 by Dr J.H.O. du Plessis in parliament. During the external affairs vote in parliament, Du Plessis, a former editor of Die Oosterlig and strong National Socialist sympathiser in the 1940's, mentioned the Cape Times article in support of his argument that there should be a change in nomenclature for the minister of external affairs.⁴² "That", he said, "is the attitude of the Cape Times. I think it is an attitude all of us in this House can subscribe to." He then went on to suggest a change in the title of high commissioner to that of "Ambassador", a change which Eric Louw had been working towards for years. Du Plessis's argument was that South Africa had reached the stage of development as "a sovereign independent state" where such a change was necessary.⁴³

The Commonwealth relations office decided, in the end, to leave matters as they stood. Describing Louw's machinations as "troublesome", it was thought best not to bring up the issue of nomenclature in discussions with Jooste because "it might have raised discussion about changing the title of High Commissioner to Ambassador which would have been a much more serious matter".⁴⁴ Clearly, what was feared most, from the British side, was the creation of a precedent by South Africa that could then be followed by the newer Commonwealth states and that could weaken the bonds between member states even further. In the event, however, the titles

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² House of Assembly Debates, col.7623, 10 June 1956.

⁴³ Ibid., col.7624, 10 June 1957.

⁴⁴ DO 119, File 1185, A.W. Snelling (CRO) - R.H. Belcher (Cape Town), 9 July 1957.

of both high commissioner and department of external affairs were retained by South Africa until she left the Commonwealth in 1961.

(c) The Flag and Anthem

Other measures taken by Strijdom's government against the symbolism of the British connection were the abolition of "God Save the Queen" as one of the national anthems and the Union Jack as one of the national flags. The move had been foreshadowed in Malan's period in the form of a private member's motion by the Nationalist MP for Namib, J. Basson in 1954.⁴⁵ Basson, supported by Malan, had argued that the country was ready for only one anthem and one flag and that the national symbols should be those which were purely South African in origin not imported from Britain or elsewhere. The 1928 Flag Act compromise in the form of two flags and anthems was unusual and reflected the strong ethnic sentiments of the time, argued the Nationalists. Now that the two main streams of the white population had grown together and had developed a purely South African nationalism the 1928 compromise was no longer necessary.

The United Party had remained committed to the 1928 act, however, and refused to accept the Nationalist line of argument, notwithstanding some conciliatory statements in the English press of the time.⁴⁶ As for extra-parliamentary opinion, as represented indirectly by the natives representatives, the attitude to such changes was clear: in 1955 when the Senate debated the question of prayer which excluded reference to the queen and Commonwealth Senator Cowley reminded the House of the African's respect for Queen Victoria.⁴⁷ Senator Ballinger added that those he represented were with him in his objection to the omission of the queen and the Commonwealth from the prayer under discussion.

In 1954 the Nationalists had not taken any action on the flag and

⁴⁵ See chapter 7, p.160.

⁴⁶ See, for example, The Star, 24 February 1954 and its report of Malan's statements on the issue in parliament in that year.

⁴⁷ World, 7 May 1955.

anthem issues, but in 1956 a surprise move by the UP member for Hospital Hill, Arthur Barlow, reopened the question. On 23 March 1956 Barlow introduced a private member's motion stating that

this House is of the opinion that in view of the necessity for promoting a sound South African national unity and in accord with the national aspirations of our people, the time has arrived for recognising the National Flag of the Union as the only official Flag and 'Die Stem van Suid Afrika in both Afrikaans and English as our South African Anthem.⁴⁸

Barlow, who claimed not to have discussed this motion with "any member of the government", then explained his conversion to the Nationalist point of view in a rambling and colloquial speech. He claimed that the passions of twenty years before would not be rekindled again and that the English South Africans could not "come to any harm" because "Die Stem" was already being sung in their schools.⁴⁹ He had been congratulated by D.F. Malan for introducing this motion, he said, and he invited colleagues to "cross the floor" and vote for one flag and anthem. It would "kill" much of the present animosity between the two language groups, he argued.

Barlow was supported by one other UP member, Frank Waring (Orange Grove), who later left the UP and became a Nationalist cabinet minister. The two were congratulated by Dönges, the home affairs minister, "for pleading in such an effective way, the cause of one flag and one anthem for South Africa" and for making Basson's earlier motion unnecessary.⁵⁰ The government then gave notice of its intention to introduce the legislation giving effect to the changes. These were duly brought about in the next parliamentary session.⁵¹ The embarrassed opposition, facing further divisions and defections

⁴⁸ House of Assembly Debates, col.3080, 23 March 1956.

⁴⁹ Ibid., col.3085, 23 March 1956.

⁵⁰ Ibid., col.3093, 23 March 1956.

⁵¹ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.224.

and having just experienced a leadership crisis (Sir de Villiers Graaff replaced the weary Strauss in November 1956), could not put up much of a fight and the measure was passed with the usual huge majority.

Indian Opinion had expressed the feelings of those who were left out of the debate because of their race by stating that "sight should not be lost of what would go with the Union Jack if it went".⁵² While the Union Jack was certainly not a "guarantee" to the people of South Africa that their rights would be protected, to remove it was

to blow out one more light which flickered, perhaps dimly amidst the deepening darkness and tyranny of the present...Against this background the European who genuinely seeks to defend the Union Jack and the values it symbolises will realise that the only real guarantee of survival for the things he considers precious is to give the non-European a vested interest in their defence.

In Britain the Daily Mirror correspondent, William Connor, stated that he was for once in agreement with Strijdom for his desire to remove the Union Jack. "Nothing", he said, "could be better in my view. Great Britain and the Crown cannot afford to be linked up with this racist madness".⁵³

In May, after the passing of the act abolishing the Union Jack and "God Save the Queen", Indian Opinion criticised English speakers for being in a mood to "surrender to apartheid" rather than "joining forces with the non-Europeans in the fight against race oppression".⁵⁴ The flag and anthem issues were raised by the government to "divert attention" from drastic measures such as the Native Laws Amendment Act forbidding race contacts even in the

⁵² Indian Opinion, 15 February 1957.

⁵³ Quoted in Indian Opinion, 15 February 1957.

⁵⁴ Indian Opinion, 10 May 1957.

Church.⁵⁵ Now the government had shown its disregard for English-speakers by abolishing "without notice" their flag and anthem and by riding roughshod over parliamentary traditions in order to get rid of the coloured vote.

What seems clear, however, is that the passions relating to national symbols had faded as far as English speakers were concerned. What had once almost brought the country to the brink of civil war now only prompted an attitude of weary resignation. In view of their muted response to such issues, it could be surmised that by the late 1950's; English speakers were more preoccupied with the perceived threats of African nationalism and communism than with the loss of their own national identity (demonstrating what Miller described as the "melancholy movement of South African politics towards a white consensus on Apartheid").⁵⁶ This attitude was to persist and to deepen in the turbulent years ahead as Nationalist race policy drove South Africa into further isolation and international ostracism.

⁵⁵ Indian Opinion, 19 May 1957

⁵⁶ Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.101.

Chapter 11: Simonstown, the High Commission Territories and Defence Issues

(a) Introduction

It has been noted that, once the British realised that their worst fears in relation to South Africa's position in the Commonwealth had not materialised, they settled into an uneasy working relationship with Strijdom's government. Issues such as Simonstown, the high commission territories and defence obligations became the stuff of formal negotiation and diplomacy which reflected the degree to which relations had become less and less of a "family" nature but which also demonstrated a certain continuity and stability.

The Simonstown negotiations had begun in Malan's period and indicated how the British were prepared to concede sovereignty in return for hopes of South Africa's continued co-operation on a whole range of issues including the high commission territories. On the latter issue the British were not prepared still to consider transfer, but negotiations over the protectorates continued to be conducted in a manner which reflected more of a concern (by both governments) with public opinion at home than with the issues at stake. Neither side was willing to risk a break by taking precipitous action.

Defence issues and the protectorates question were linked to some extent in that South Africa demanded certain air and land access rights for defence purposes in those territories. These demands were useful for propaganda purposes and as bargaining points in negotiations over the incorporation issue. They also had the effect of keeping public opinion on the boil and provoked concerned reactions in Britain and the Commonwealth.

However, white and black opinions remained poles apart on these issues. Black nationalist opinion without exception criticised the NP's continued attempts to assert South African sovereignty

over the territories and also remained suspicious of British intentions. The two main white parties supported incorporation but only argued about the method of achieving it. Only a handful of liberal natives' representatives questioned the whole motivation behind the incorporation demand. By the time Dr Verwoerd had come to power in 1958 the issue remained unresolved although the Tomlinson commission report had suggested a possible change of tactics through its implication that the territories should be treated as if they were self-governing homelands.¹

(b) The Simonstown Agreement

It has been noted how during Malan's premiership the National Party lost its reluctance to join alliances, particularly alliances with Britain and the Commonwealth. In the context of the Cold War the South African government saw itself as the leading Western state in Africa and identified communism as the biggest enemy. Thus a strategy evolved of trying to gain a place in an alliance and of trying to commit the West to defend Africa. As the leading colonial power in Africa, Britain was of necessity the key to such a strategy. During Malan's period regular defence consultations between Britain and South Africa took place, there were exchanges of personnel, and Britain remained South Africa's main supplier of equipment.²

There were, however, different perceptions about what each side wanted out of negotiations for defence agreements. South Africa wanted an extension of NATO to the southern African continent and an African alliance while Britain was more concerned with obtaining a commitment from South Africa to defend the Middle East. These differing perceptions continued into the period of negotiations over Simonstown during Strijdom's premiership.

The differences had also emerged, briefly, during discussions at

¹ Hyam, The Failure of South African Expansion, p.193.

² Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.56.

the unofficial 1954 Commonwealth relations conference in Lahore, indicating how defence matters as well as political issues were beginning to complicate South Africa's Commonwealth relations in the 1950's.³ A South African delegate there had claimed that Malan was ambivalent about closer defence ties with Britain and the Commonwealth but had "no reservations" about binding commitments outside the Commonwealth - such as joining NATO. These comments then initiated a "vigorous controversy" about the desirability of South Africa joining NATO, with British delegates reportedly "divided" on the issue. One noted that NATO was both a military and an ideological alliance and would be better on balance without South Africa's membership. This indirect comment on South Africa's race policies was then "repudiated" by the other British and South African delegates.

Underlying the negotiations between Britain and South Africa over Simonstown were broadly different strategic policy aims. What resulted was a form of compromise that only partly satisfied both parties. South Africa achieved sovereignty over the naval base and a vague commitment by Britain to help defend southern Africa from external attack while Britain received unconditional use of the base in peace and war and the promise of South African help in keeping the Cape sea lanes open in the event of a war in which both Britain and South Africa were involved.⁴ South Africa undertook to purchase six frigates and other naval craft from Britain and also promised not to discriminate against non-Europeans in the employment conditions at the Simonstown base. The latter condition was the only reference to racial matters but it had caused some concern in British cabinet discussions.

³ Mansergh, The Fifth Unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference, p.128.

⁴ The full terms of the Simonstown Agreement are set out in the "Exchanges of Letters on Defence Matters between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Union of South Africa", Cmd. 9520, HMSO, June 1955. I have relied on the summary in Commonwealth Survey, Vol.1, No. 14, 12 July 1955 ("United Kingdom/South Africa Defence Agreements"), pp.583-584.

During the last year of Malan's premiership, negotiations over Simonstown were at an advanced stage while Churchill was still prime minister in Britain. Differences of opinion emerged between Churchill and his ministers over certain aspects of the proposed treaty.⁵ On 27 August 1954 Churchill noted how strategically important Simonstown was to Britain "in the light of the reduced importance of the Suez Canal and the greater uncertainty about the degree of co-operation in defence matters which was to be expected of the South African government in the future".⁶ He felt doubtful whether in any circumstances Britain should consider abandoning her legal right to perpetual use of the Simonstown base.

The Commonwealth secretary, Lord Swinton, had argued that the object of discussion was to encourage South Africa to take a "broader view of their responsibilities in Commonwealth defence". The defence minister, Earl Alexander, pointed out that even from the point of view of Britain's use of Simonstown it was important to ensure the fullest possible co-operation of the South African government in order to safeguard continued supplies of labour, electricity and power to the base.

When the issue was discussed again on 1 September 1954 Alexander reported that he had told Erasmus that other Commonwealth governments would have to be consulted in view of the base's strategic importance to them.⁷ He had also told Erasmus that it was imperative for Britain to have the base freely available in peace and in war (even if South Africa were not allied to Britain in such a war) and that the base should be "efficiently organised and maintained". Erasmus had agreed to these conditions.

⁵ See Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, pp.100-106, for a fuller discussion of these differences.

⁶ PRO, CAB 128/27, Part 2 (29 June - Dec. 1954), C.C.(54)57,4. "South Africa: Simonstown Naval Base", 27 August 1954.

⁷ C.C.(54)52,2. "South Africa: Simonstown Naval Base", 1 September 1954.

Churchill again indicated his reservations and said he was "reluctant to contemplate any transaction which would be presented as yet another surrender of the rights and responsibilities of the United Kingdom". With somewhat prophetic words⁸ he pointed out that

the political pressure engendered by the colour problem might lead South Africa at some time to sever her ties with the United Kingdom and the rest of the Commonwealth. Indeed, this consideration might underlie the Union's desire to have the base handed over to her.⁹

Swinton then argued that the base was of "little value" without South Africa's co-operation anyway and that the repair facilities at Simonstown were "very limited". In war the UK would always need the additional facilities of Durban and Cape Town. So an agreement which safeguarded Britain's requirements, he said, would be "preferable to having no agreement and being unable to use Simonstown in practice because of South African hostility".¹⁰

It was reported on 15 September¹¹ that Erasmus had been told that Britain would look at his plan for an African regional organisation but only if it was "clearly complementary to sound arrangements in the Middle East". The CRO had been in favour of some measure of support for Erasmus's plan on the grounds that it would take South Africa out of her neutral stance and would

⁸ Ingham, "The British Government and Apartheid", pp.8-9.

⁹ PRO, CAB 128/27, C.C.(54)52,2. 1 September 1954.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ CAB 129/70 (23 July -28 Sept.1954), C.(54)291, "South Africa Defence Talks: Memorandum by the Minister of Defence and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations", 15 September 1954.

help against "communist subversion".¹² The foreign office, on the other hand, had rejected the idea and Eden had reminded cabinet of the disadvantages: Belgium and Portugal would not join it and there was opposition in the African colonies to the presence of South African forces.

Eden had stated on 8 September that undue importance should not be attached to Malan's African Pact which other powers would be reluctant to join. An inter-departmental meeting also opposed the idea on the grounds of hostilities that it would provoke in other colonies.¹³ All that was favoured was the establishment of a supporting organisation for logistics as a possible corollary to the Nairobi and Dakar arrangements. It would not have the drawback of a South African-led, anti-communist, military alliance.

So, as Berridge points out, Swinton and the CRO had been "outgunned" and he had to give Erasmus the further "bad news" that there would be no African Pact unless it were clearly complementary to Middle East plans.¹⁴ It was therefore "not surprising" that South Africa's commitment to the Middle East was "in no way strengthened" by these negotiations.

On 15 September Swinton had told the British cabinet that if further negotiations resulted in a sound and comprehensive plan guaranteeing all Britain needed it would be clearly to Britain's advantage: but rejection of it "would jeopardise the whole range of South African co-operation with us".¹⁵

To assuage South African disappointment it was decided to move swiftly on working out the terms of reference of a joint working

¹² Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, pp.107-108.

¹³ Ibid., p.108.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.109.

¹⁵ PRO, CAB 129/70, C.(54)291, 15 September 1954.

committee which would be sent to South Africa to discuss Simonstown. When the committee reported back in December it noted South African willingness to buy naval equipment in Britain but also stated doubts about the National Party's commitment to an agreement once the base was in South African hands.¹⁶ Their ability to run it efficiently was also in doubt. Churchill was persuaded in December to allow discussions to go forward after the February Commonwealth conference and the South Africans agreed to avoid advance publicity about any agreement so as to increase the British Conservative Party's chances at the forthcoming general election.¹⁷ Strijdom, who replaced Malan in December, suggested an appropriate "cover" in the form of a pre-election trip to London by Erasmus.

Between December 1954 and June of 1955 the two governments finalised details of the agreement in an exchange of letters. In the meantime Strijdom had become prime minister in South Africa and in Britain Churchill had retired, with the foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, taking his place. The May general election had given the Tories a bigger majority and so the worries concerning the domestic effects of any agreement on defence with South Africa had receded. Eden was anxious to conclude an agreement quickly that would satisfy Britain's strategic concerns in the South Atlantic and Middle East. On South Africa's side Erasmus and Louw were pursuing their own versions of an African regional defence system which the British were trying to stall having realised that such schemes were bound to fail if they included South African participation.¹⁸

In South Africa disquiet had arisen in the ranks of the official opposition about the secret nature of the Simonstown talks and the lack of information coming from the government. In the

¹⁶ Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, pp.110-111.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.112.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.118-120.

Assembly in February 1955 Erasmus refused to divulge details of what had been discussed at the 1954 prime ministers' conference, especially on defence matters. Nothing had been said there about Simonstown, he said in reply to opposition demands for information, because "that was a matter entirely between the Government of the United Kingdom and our Government".¹⁹ He would have refused to discuss it if it were brought up as it would "show the old idea that the Commonwealth is a kind of super-Parliament". All he would reveal is that discussions with Britain had reached "an advanced stage" and that he discussed with the British the necessity of establishing an African Defence Organisation of "anti-communist countries south of the Sahara".²⁰

In May the UP again asked for more information on Simonstown from Erasmus. Their defence affairs spokesman outlined the UP opposition stance on transfer of the base and noted that "this was a matter in which we have to walk very slowly".²¹ The UP, he said, would support the establishment of a South African naval base provided "we are in a position to accept the responsibility".²² He asked for a secret bipartisan defence committee to be set up in order to "put the House more in touch with the position as it stands".

Erasmus rejected the latter proposal and accused the UP of sabotaging the defence discussions with Britain by suggesting that South Africa's military preparedness left much to be desired.²³ Referring to an article in the Cape Times of 11 May entitled "Disquiet on Defence Preparedness", he claimed such reports did "incalculable harm" at a time when he was busy with

¹⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.1256, 17 February 1955.

²⁰ Ibid., col.1261, 17 February 1955.

²¹ Ibid., col.5470, 11 May 1955.

²² Ibid., cols 5470-5471, 11 May 1955.

²³ Ibid., col. 5472, 11 May and cols 5498-5500 , 12 May 1955.

important negotiations.

The British had been aware of the state of South Africa's defences since the "purge" of the top command conducted by Erasmus in the years after 1948. It had resulted in the resignation or dismissal of battle-hardened English officers such as General Evered Poole, Smuts's former army chief. This factor, together with what was perceived to be an inadequate level of expenditure on modern equipment, was according to some commentators an important reason why the British were tending to discount South Africa's value as an ally in the 1950's.²⁴ In the 1955 parliamentary session various UP speakers brought up this concern and continued to raise the implications again of not allowing the arming of blacks. Colonel Stanford (natives representative Eastern Cape) argued that it was ridiculous to expect "a small white population" to defend a country of South Africa's size and foresaw difficulties in co-operation with the USA and other countries if the "exclusive policy towards our Africans" continued.²⁵ He referred to the difficulties experienced earlier that year when a US aircraft carrier visited Cape Town with some black crew members.

On 23 June the British cabinet discussed a memorandum by the minister of defence and the first sea lord on the last stages of consultations with Erasmus on defence matters. They reported that it seemed likely they could obtain a satisfactory agreement on Simonstown and on naval co-operation generally, but that there was "little prospect of obtaining a firm promise of South African co-operation in the Middle East or of persuading them to abandon their project of an African Defence Organisation".²⁶ The defence minister, Selwyn Lloyd, asked cabinet whether in future

²⁴ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, pp.58-59.

²⁵ House of Assembly Debates, cols 5552-5553, 12 May 1955.

²⁶ CAB 128/29 (April - Dec. 1955), C.M.(55)17,8, "South Africa: Defence Co-operation", 23 June 1955.

negotiations he should aim at agreement on Simonstown and naval co-operation together with a promise of military staff talks on the Middle East or whether "in default of a firm promise regarding the Middle East, the whole discussion should be adjourned".

Eden replied that he "would not put too high a value on a South African undertaking to contribute towards the defence of the Middle East". The Union government of the day, he said, would take the decision to go to war or not "in the light of prevailing circumstances". Secret staff talks "to which Erasmus might agree" would give Britain almost as much assurance of South African support in this area "as any formal commitment by the present government". He preferred to concentrate on securing the most satisfactory agreement that Britain could obtain on the Simonstown base and on naval co-operation in general. Erasmus was prepared to sign an agreement which met all Britain's requirements. South Africa was prepared to spend £18m on naval vessels and this would have the effect of "linking the Royal Navy to the South African Navy for some years to come".

Turning to the question of coloured labour at the base Eden stated his concern that while the agreement was defensible on strategic grounds it could still be criticised on the grounds of "discrimination against Coloured workers". He suggested that Britain should try to improve the safeguards which the agreement provided them.²⁷ Discussion ensued on Clause 9(a) in which South Africa agreed to provide Non-European labour in the dockyard on the "basis of merit" if a deficiency of qualified European labour occurred.

It was agreed that in further discussions every effort should be made to persuade Erasmus to give a firmer assurance that racial discrimination would be avoided in the recruitment of new labour

²⁷ Ibid.

for the dockyard.²⁸ It was also decided that the "primary objective" was to get a satisfactory agreement on Simonstown and on naval co-operation in general. This should not be "prejudiced" by insistence on a firm South African promise of co-operation in the defence of the Middle East.

By 28 June the British cabinet had accepted "improved safeguards" for the future recruitment of coloured labour at the dockyards and it was decided to make these safeguards public despite the possibility that "...it might provoke demands for similar conditions at other Admiralty establishments overseas".²⁹ It was agreed that this was a "risk which had to be taken in the interests of securing full public support in this country for the transfer of the Simonstown base to South Africa". It was also pointed out that a certain paragraph of the relevant clause "might seem to imply" that the Admiralty already discriminated extensively on the grounds of race or colour between different classes of their employees at Simonstown. The wording should be adjusted, it was argued, "to give less prominence to this point".

It was agreed that publication would not take place before 4 July and that other "interested foreign governments" in Africa and the Middle East as well as colonial governments in Africa would be informed in advance but only at "the last moment" in order to avoid premature disclosures.³⁰ (The latter indicated a certain nervousness about the effect on public opinion in the colonies). Berridge notes that the foreign office was not happy with the clause relating to British commitments to defend southern Africa in the event of a war in which both countries were involved.³¹ The area might be "impossible to defend" in the event of a global war. Furthermore, the commitment to staff talks on the Middle

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ CAB 128/29, C.M.(55)18, 3, "South Africa: Defence Co-operation", 28 June 1955.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, p.128.

East was not a weighty enough "quid pro quo" by the South Africans. Nevertheless the cabinet authorised all four drafts of the agreement (an agreement for joint defence of the Cape sea route with the possibility of other maritime powers joining, the Simonstown base, the regional defence commitments and staff talks on the Middle East).

On 30 June the British cabinet was told by the minister of defence, Selwyn Lloyd, that the discussions had been "satisfactorily concluded".³² The agreement would also be registered with UNO despite Erasmus's initial disagreement.³³ The results would be announced simultaneously in both countries on 4 July with the text to be published that afternoon in the form of a White Paper. The Labour opposition leader, Hugh Gaitskell, would be given an advance copy "shortly before announcements were to be made in the House of Commons on 4 July". Earlier, Labour's defence spokesman, James Callaghan, had expressed his concern about the agreement's possible effect on Britain's purely strategic position without mentioning its implications in terms of Britain's international relations.³⁴ The latter only became a Labour Party concern in the 1960's and led eventually to public opinion in the Commonwealth and Britain forcing the Labour government to cancel the Simonstown Agreement.

Berridge notes that the "public version and the reality" of the Simonstown Agreement were very different.³⁵ The assurance from South Africa over the "unqualified" use of the base in future did not mean much because South Africa viewed British collaboration in the Cold War as "axiomatic". The expansion of the South African navy was unlikely to be carried through (as events later demonstrated). So the main reason for the whole agreement in

³² CAB 128/29, C.M.(55)19,4, "South Africa: Defence Cooperation", 30 June 1955.

³³ Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, p.131.

³⁴ Ingham, "The British Government and Apartheid", p.8

³⁵ Berridge, The Rise and Fall of the White Entente, p.131.

British eyes was the need to "spend money on other things" in a time of reassessment of defence priorities. It was also because the

symbolic cost of the agreement to the Empire and to the relative strength of the English-speakers in the Union which the sacrifice of sovereignty over the base would entail, and which in the event Churchill alone had not been prepared to incur, was now believed to be less important.³⁶

Out-weighing this cost was the wish to avoid putting "needless strain" on the friendship with South Africa in future and that is why the "entente" was more in favour of Pretoria than London, concludes Berridge. The broader picture was provided by South Africa's gold and uranium supplies and by the high commission territories as well as South African opposition to the inclusion of independent states in the Commonwealth (still a factor in Strijdom's first year of power). The "slender" concession by South Africa on staff talks on the Middle East, together with the concessions concerning exemption from apartheid for coloured workers at the base

gives the lie to the orthodox view - cleverly inspired by the British government that even in its formal terms the Simonstown Agreements were very favourable to Britain.³⁷

South Africa's high commissioner in Britain at the time, Gerhardt Jooste, felt that South Africa had made significant concessions by allowing the base to be available to Britain in time of war and by agreeing to what he considered to be "interference in our domestic affairs" ("inmenging in ons huishuidelike sake")

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p.132.

concerning the issue of coloured workers at the naval base.³⁸ Jooste noted with satisfaction in his memoirs, however, that the South African flag now flew over the base and that when the Labour government cancelled the deal in 1975 the base came "for once and for all, unconditionally under the control and sovereignty of the Republic of South Africa".³⁹

A postscript to the whole affair was written in November when the cabinet was informed of South Africa's decision to cancel two of the six frigates she was supposed to have ordered from Britain according to the July agreement. An aggrieved memorandum by the British defence minister, Lloyd, noted that the order for six frigates had been "a considerable justification in our eyes" for transferring Simonstown to South Africa.⁴⁰ Erasmus had told him that he was limited to an expenditure of £18m and that rising costs and the need for adequate stores and provisions made it impossible for him to order all the frigates, but that this would be reconsidered "in a year's time".

Lloyd also reported that Erasmus had suggested during talks in October that the Simonstown Agreement should be extended to include other countries such as France, Belgium and Portugal.⁴¹ The British had "persuaded" him it was wiser to have the broad shape of the agreement for maritime co-operation settled first between the two founder members (Britain and South Africa). Then if other countries later agreed, a conference could be held in Cape Town. This aspect of the agreement turned out to be a dead letter, however, for no other country was prepared to be involved with South Africa in such an organisation. The conference on

³⁸ Gerhardt Jooste, Diensherinneringe, (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1977), p.174.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ PRO, CAB 129/78 (14 Oct. - 31 Dec. 1955), C.P.(55)170, "Defence Talks with South Africa: Memorandum by the Minister of Defence", 3 November 1955.

⁴¹ Ibid.

maritime co-operation never took place, neither did the agreed international consultations on the defence of southern Africa which lapsed as a result of lack of interest from other powers, notably the United States.

The British-South African staff talks on the Middle East became similarly redundant. In the October 1955 discussions Erasmus had expressed his fears that the British agenda for such talks might imply the commitment of South African forces to the Middle East.⁴² He had insisted on the talks being "informal" with no set agenda. British efforts to obtain a Middle Eastern Defence Organisation (MEDO) had in any case collapsed and South Africa's reluctance to take part was but one facet of this failure.

The Cape Argus, in June 1956, summarised the situation concerning South Africa's failure to obtain any defence agreements (other than Simonstown). Noting that the Commonwealth prime ministers' conference in London would be discussing the new Soviet competitive co-existence policy, the editor stated "the time was ripe" to discuss South Africa's defence as well, especially in the light of South Africa's withdrawal from commitments to the Middle East.⁴³ The Commonwealth had a system of regional alliances, but South Africa still had no pact for Africa, the Middle East or the South Atlantic for her to join. South Africa had pressed for the defence of Africa without success and there was no defence agreement for the Middle East. Instead she was criticised from all sides for her racial policies and effectively shunned, so that "she was not in a position to undertake commitments in the rest of the world".

The Simonstown Agreement, it could be argued, thus represented both the high and low points of South Africa's attempts to find alliances in the western world. Even if, as Berridge points out, it favoured South Africa more than Britain, it nevertheless

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cape Argus, 28 June 1956.

turned out to be a failure for South Africa in terms of the wider strategy of involving major powers in the defence of southern Africa. The increasing isolation which South Africa found herself in because of her racial policies was both the context and the major constraining factor in her foreign relations. The agreement might therefore have only provided temporary satisfaction at home as a symbolic display of assertive nationalism by South Africa and as an assurance to white voters that at least one major power remained on her side.

(c) The High Commission Territories 1954-1958

Strijdom, like Malan before him, continued to try to persuade Britain to hand over the protectorates but, as one author has pointed out, these efforts lacked the force and conviction of Malan's previous attempts.⁴⁴ Strijdom raised the issue personally at the 1956 Commonwealth prime ministers' conference but experienced the usual polite British refusal to entertain the thought of transfer "at the present time" and until the inhabitants had been consulted.⁴⁵

English-language newspapers such as The Star and the Rand Daily Mail adopted a resigned attitude to Strijdom's failure noting that he was not personally to blame and that the United Party would have received the same British response.⁴⁶ British policy towards the inhabitants of the territories and South Africa's policies towards its own black population had diverged to the point where it was politically impossible for Britain to allow transfer. As The Star put it, "Britain must dig its heels in until and unless more tolerant policies are followed in Cape Town".⁴⁷ Or, as the Rand Daily Mail editor more cynically noted:

⁴⁴ Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.21.

⁴⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 6 July 1956.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Star, 26 July 1956.

If the apartheid state is all that its founders believe it to be the time must come when the people of the protectorates clamour to be incorporated. We have only to wait patiently until they see the advantages of our system and petition the British Government to be handed over.⁴⁸

Public opinion was a key factor, at least for the British government. No British government could have afforded the storm of protest that would have arisen in Britain and in the Commonwealth if moves had been made to hand the territories over to South Africa's apartheid government. For Strijdom, on the other hand, it was a matter of prestige to continue the Nationalist campaign to incorporate the territories but, being an astute politician, he probably realised that it was not enough of an election issue to warrant pressing too hard for it. Furthermore, as Geldenhuys noted, he was probably aware that any attempt to get the territories would be fruitless.⁴⁹ Yet, he had to make an attempt for the sake of Nationalist opinion.

He also probably knew that by keeping up the pressure on Britain to hand them over valuable concessions could be extracted in other areas, notably defence. The Simonstown negotiations and negotiations on defence co-operation in general were influenced by these considerations. The cabinet memorandum by Swinton and Alexander in 1954 had referred to the "whole range of co-operation" with South Africa in southern Africa that would be "jeopardised" if no agreement was reached on Simonstown.⁵⁰ Furthermore, if pressure was kept up, concessions on certain

⁴⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 6 July 1956.

⁴⁹ Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.21

⁵⁰ PRO, CAB 129/70, C.(54)291, "South Africa Defence Talks", 15 September, 1954.

aspects of the administration of the protectorates could be obtained, such as strategic military access for South Africa and the return of political refugees. This was aided by the awareness on the part of the British of the weakness of their position in southern Africa, first revealed during the Seretse affair. A brief look at some of the correspondence in the dominions office files for the period reveals this factor as well as considerable awareness by the British of the motivations behind South African policy towards the protectorates.

In February 1955 the high commissioner, commenting on a remark by Verwoerd in the House of Assembly to the effect that it was necessary to arrest the progress of British policy in the territories because they differed from South African policies, said in a note to the CRO that most of the South African arguments for annexation had been from F.C. Erasmus for "defence reasons".⁵¹ Now, however, "inevitably there were more statements in Parliament". The CRO noted that there were "contradictions" in Nationalist policy towards the territories.⁵² On the one hand they needed to have "slogans arousing racial fears in order to win votes at home" and on the other hand, they had to try to "minimise" racial slogans in order to show that South African racial policy was the same as that in the high commission territories.

On 2 March the Rand Daily Mail reported Strijdom's remarks in parliament concerning the protectorates. He had said that he was just as concerned as Malan had been about transfer and that it was "intolerable in a dangerous world" to have a breach between Britain and South Africa over native policy in Africa.⁵³

⁵¹ PRO, DO 119, File 1181 (1955: Administration of the High Commission Territories, Future of), No. 15, High Commissioner Cape Town to CRO London, 4 February 1955.

⁵² Ibid., No. 65, T.V. Scrivenor (CRO) to High Commissioner, 24 August 1955.

⁵³ Rand Daily Mail, 2 March 1955.

Liesching, a few weeks later, seemed to think the question of transfer was "quiescent at this time" and that nobody in the Union had mentioned it to him.⁵⁴ He wondered whether Strijdom before he took office knew of the "firm but friendly" warnings given from London about the "head-on collision and deadlock" which would ensue if the Union claims were pressed. He referred to documents like Attlee's message to Malan on 2 November 1949 and Lord Swinton's personal letter to Malan on 1 April 1954.

He had asked Forsyth, secretary of external affairs, to mention it to Strijdom and after some hesitation Forsyth had said he would mention it to Visser (in charge of the prime minister's department) and if Strijdom started to talk of transfer he would remind him of the UK position. He also promised not to reveal this "personal initiative" and said he now had confirmation about the "unchanged position" of the British concerning transfer.

Liesching ended this report by noting that there was a possibility that Strijdom's closest official advisers were ignorant of the secret exchanges with Malan in April of the previous year. This was because of the separation of the prime minister's department from the department of external affairs announced by Strijdom when he came to power.

In April Strijdom made some more statements in the Assembly concerning both the protectorates and the republican issue which were interpreted as "bellicose" by the CRO.⁵⁵ Strijdom had said he was reasserting his government's policies concerning the protectorates, would not "leave it where it was" and would proceed with a republic when there was adequate voter support. Did this presage a reopening of the transfer question in the near future and a "stiffening" of the Union's position, asked the CRO? A.W. Snelling, for the high commissioner's office in Cape Town,

⁵⁴ PRO, DO 119, File 1181, No. 25, H.C. (Liesching) to G. Laithwaite CRO, 7 April 1955.

⁵⁵ Ibid., No.32, CRO to Snelling, Cape Town, 22 April 1955.

replied that while this interpretation was substantially correct Strijdom's statements were made at the end of a "long and vigorous" debate on the prime minister's vote and that three other speakers had raised the issue of transfer.⁵⁶ One of them, G.F.H. Becker (NP Cradock), had made an "unfriendly reference" to the UK and the proposed hydro-electric scheme in Basutoland. A. Barlow, the UP "rebel" for Hospital Hill, had declared the time was ripe for the Union to carry out the contract made before Union and J.H. Fouche' (NP Rustenburg) had declared the "danger" of the territories for the Union.

As Snelling put it, Strijdom "could hardly fail to reply and under the circumstances what he said was not immoderate". There were doubts whether the question would come to the fore again until the October or November conferences because "the NP pack" was then in full cry after its "constitutional quarry" (the removal of the coloured vote) and had its hands full. Furthermore, it was "not in character" for South Africa's government to "shout loudly about the Protectorates when they are hopeful that if they are nice to us for a little while Simonstown will fall into their lap".

In June, 1955 the Commonwealth secretary, Lord Home, wrote to Liesching saying he was glad Strijdom's statements did not presage immediate future requests for transfer but that he was also concerned about possible actions and practical measures in the future when he did.⁵⁷ He asked for Liesching's views on such measures and on various preparatory measures such as the removal of Bechuanaland HQ from Mafeking. He expected a "gradual tightening of the screw" by South Africa in the form of a "withdrawal of one facility after another" rather than a "total blockade". The example of South Africa's earlier refusal to allow students from the protectorates at universities and schools in the Union was the first such action. Now, perhaps, embargoes on

⁵⁶ Ibid., No.33, A.W. Snelling to CRO, 10 May 1955.

⁵⁷ Ibid., No. 35, Home to Liesching, 11 June 1955.

medical specialists, vaccines, research facilities, transport to Swaziland, exports or blockades of maize sales or a demand for the revision of the customs treaty could come from the Union. It was necessary, he said, to see which measures could be countered "without too much expense" and which could not. There was a need for the early appreciation of South Africa's intentions and plans in advance, especially concerning "unfriendly acts".⁵⁸

Enclosed with Home's letter to Liesching was a highly significant memorandum, undated and unsigned but presumably drawn up for the Commonwealth secretary by officials of the department, outlining alternatives facing the British and possible "counter-actions" in the event of South African hostility to the protectorates.⁵⁹ It can be regarded as one of the first official British initiatives concerning the drawing up of contingency plans for the worst-case scenario of a major deterioration of relations with South Africa. Although confined to the protectorates issue, it entertained the possibility of economic and other sanctions and their repercussions for both sides.

The memorandum began by ruling out the weapon of withdrawal of labour supplies to the Union "as Basutoland depended too much on it". It went on to suggest that international sanctions or the withdrawal of defence co-operation could be a "two-edged sword". It outlined all the areas of co-operation between the British and South Africa that could be affected by hostility. They included the "Memorandum of Understanding" concerning South African gold supplies and South Africa's access to the London market for loans (but it was noted that the former agreement had lapsed in 1954 and the latter had not been used by South Africa since 1947 although many private investors "might back off"). The CDFC (Commonwealth Development Finance Corporation), which worked closely with the UK government could, it suggested, be "induced" to alter its lending policy to South Africa although it had

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ File 1181, No.35, "Memorandum", n.d.

recently lent money to ESCOM and the South African Industrial Cellulose Corporation (SAICC).

As for South Africa's gold, which South Africa had sold exclusively in London since the reopening of the gold market in 1954, they could "easily be sold via the Swiss if Britain blocked them". If South Africa then blocked British imports in return it could "affect our gold earnings", the memo warned.

By and large, the Union co-operates extremely well in the Sterling Area matters, and any diminution in their co-operation might prejudice the success of our policies, eg: in respect of convertibility [of sterling].

On uranium it said the UK was committed via the CDA (Combined Development Agency) to a large loan programme to South Africa for the uranium mines and "would rely almost wholly on South African supplies until 1962, with minor exceptions".⁶⁰

On Simonstown the memorandum noted that the case for handing Simonstown to South Africa rested on the premise that "it would be better, given certain safeguards, to have Simonstown in the hands of a co-operative South African government than to try to operate it ourselves in the face of a bitterly opposed South Africa...It would not therefore be in the UK's interest to use delaying tactics on Simonstown as a means of retaliation quite apart from the obvious difficulties of doing so".⁶¹

On defence planning and equipment the memo said the South African approach concerning firm commitments in peace and war was "slow, leisurely" and "unrealistic", but the UK position was that of a "suitor" and was "weak", so it could not do anything until SA had a "more realistic approach".

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

The report concluded that all the above-mentioned measures that could be taken by Britain were "too costly" and the provision of alternative transport systems for the protectorates would be equally so. However, "any measures to develop the territories towards self-sufficiency would help, as was going on at present in education and medicine". The territories would never be completely independent of South Africa and were "vulnerable to pressure". Only Bechuanaland could withstand a blockade with increased UK aid.

A later note from the deputy high commissioner in reply adopted a more sanguine view of the Union's intentions than those mooted above. It criticised the suggestion that South Africa's acts against the territories would "necessarily be hostile in nature" and said instead that "I think we are treated better by the Union than we would be treated financially and otherwise by any British territory".⁶² The real problem was finding ways to make the territories self-sufficient in economic and social services, internal security, communications and the ability to absorb labour.

In July Strijdom was reported to have said after a Senate debate on the prime minister's vote that the time was not right to press the incorporation issue again.⁶³ He said that a request for a conference of the UK and SA over the protectorates had been refused by the UK on the grounds that the time was not suitable. But he reiterated the call for transfer and gave all the South African reasons again.

This time his call received unexpected support in the British House of Lords where the former governor-general of Nigeria, Lord

⁶² DO 119, File 1204 (1956-60: Administration, High Commission Territories. Notes on aspects likely to arise in connection with transfer), Note by Deputy High Commissioner on possible Union withdrawal of facilities, 1955.

⁶³ File 1181, No. 37, Presse Telegram from the UK representative, Cape Town, to the High Commissioner, Pretoria, 18 June 1955.

Milverton, argued for incorporation. On 27 July the Commonwealth secretary, Lord Home, wrote to Liesching saying that he had had to rebut Milverton's speech and had to reiterate again the British policy statement to the effect that the time was not ripe "according to conditions that exist at the present time" and had again expressed the hope that co-operation with South Africa "over a wide range of practical issues would continue".⁶⁴

A leader article in Die Transvaler of 28 July then claimed that "the weary old British formula "of time not ripe under present conditions" was "trotted out again".⁶⁵ This, the article claimed, "was a case of internal British politics and not being able to lose the support of radicals in the UK". Time would eventually mean a "process of wearing away" and would "eventually bring the Protectorates to their intended destination", the article claimed. Lord Milverton's speech "would help". A few weeks later, Dagbreek en Sondagnuus also referred to the British response to the question of incorporation.⁶⁶ In an article entitled "This Week in Politics" by W. van Heerden, it was stated:

We might as well cease bluffing ourselves with the idea that we will achieve transfer of the Protectorates in the present circumstances in the sense in which it was intended in 1910.

This was all because of British political reasons, the article went on to say, but it was hoped the UK would recognise the "importance of the Protectorates for South Africa's apartheid programme". A common British, South African and Central African Federation policy would be best for the territories, and would be "a boost for separate development" in southern Africa.

⁶⁴ Ibid., No.46, Home - Liesching, 27 July 1955.

⁶⁵ Ibid., No.48, Die Transvaler, 28 July 1955.

⁶⁶ File 1181, No.56, Dagbreek en Sondagnuus, 14 August 1955

Lord Home wrote to Liesching in comment upon the Dagbreek article and asked whether he thought it meant a new attempt by Strijdom to try out unofficially a new approach to the protectorates.⁶⁷ A draft reply from Liesching claimed the article represented "typical Nationalist Party double think" concerning slogans but was needed to justify apartheid on occasions when NP politicians would try to "minimise differences" over policy.⁶⁸ A full reply to Home from G.H. Baxter for the high commissioner on 18 July then also pointed out that the Dagbreek was a "nominally independent" and "moderate" Nationalist paper with Verwoerd, Strijdom, Naude', etc. on its Board of Trustees.⁶⁹ Van Heerden's article was his own and it was unlikely that the South African government would agree to co-operate with Britain and the CAF concerning the territories nor was it likely "that Apartheid would be dropped yet as a slogan".

Towards the end of 1955 , during general defence discussions with the British in October, South Africa's defence minister, F.C. Erasmus, indicated that South Africa wanted discussions concerning the surveying of possible radar sites in the protectorates. This was to be the first of several defence-related demands made in the following years. In 1957 it was overflying rights, in 1958 and 1959 it was right of access to South African troops through Bechuanaland.⁷⁰ The British proved amenable concerning radar sites and overflying rights but balked at allowing physical access to the Caprivi Strip via Martins Drift in Bechuanaland.⁷¹ While it was felt that South Africa

⁶⁷ DO 119, File 1181, No. 56, Home - Liesching, 15 August 1955.

⁶⁸ Ibid., No. 58, Liesching - Home, n.d.

⁶⁹ Ibid., No.61, G.H. Baxter - Home, 18 August 1955.

⁷⁰ DO 119, File 1193 (1958: Defence. Transit of UDF Vehicles and Personnel through High Commission Territories) and File 1205 (Defence: High Commission Territories, General).

⁷¹ File 1205, No.2, Secretary of State Commonwealth Relations - High Commissioner, Cape Town, 27 January 1959.

may have had genuine defence reasons for such requests, in particular the first, concerning the last it was also felt that there was an element of political manoeuvre and perhaps a desire to "embarrass" the British government.

In November 1956 the British minister of defence, Selwyn Lloyd, reported favourably on the radar site request to his cabinet colleagues in London. He reported that he had asked Erasmus not to ignore British industry when purchasing radar equipment but that Erasmus had replied that price would be the "governing factor".⁷² However, the talks had been "friendly" and Erasmus appeared "well-satisfied". Britain had agreed to allow such radar sites (according to an undertaking made by Swinton in June) subject to joint surveying and certain technical safeguards concerning the building and control of such sites. Lloyd wrote:

I think he [Erasmus] genuinely tried to meet our wishes [and] we felt it advantageous to be as helpful to him as possible...The fields in which we can be co-operative with South Africa are limited....it may help over more difficult issues (such as the Gold Coast in the Commonwealth) if we can accumulate what goodwill we can over less controversial issues now.

By this time the South Africans were seriously considering a change of emphasis in their approach to the territories. The Tomlinson commission report of 1954 (the complete summary of its findings were only released in March 1956) recommended treating the territories as potential homelands which would add 45% to the

⁷² PRO, CAB129/78 (14 October - 31 December 1955), C.P. (55)170, Memorandum by the Minister of Defence: Defence Talks with South Africa, No.5. Radar Early Warning System, 3 November 1955.

area of the native trust areas envisaged in 1936.⁷³ In February 1956 Verwoerd indicated the direction in which the government was moving when he replied to one of the natives representatives who had claimed that the removal of the coloured franchise made transfer of the protectorates impossible. He said that even if the coloureds were on a common roll the inhabitants of the protectorates would still reject incorporation because they "value their independent existence" and did not want to be swallowed by the Union.⁷⁴ Only South Africa's apartheid policy, said Verwoerd, guaranteed their independence. British policy, on the other hand, meant more white colonisation and the loss of economic control. South Africa would give the inhabitants the chance to join their "blood brothers" in the native areas of South Africa.⁷⁵

The high commissioner's office had interpreted an earlier speech by Verwoerd on the same topic (during the no confidence debate) as meaning "transfer was necessary to save the Protectorates from British colonial policy".⁷⁶ Officials expected that the question of transfer would be reopened by South Africa based on a "six-point claim" and that therefore there was a need to counter it with detailed reasons why there would be no transfer, being careful "not to make an indictment of South Africa's policy on apartheid" since "most South Africans agree with it" and "an indictment would not be helpful".

The language of this particular British assessment of South Africa's motives is significant. Not only did it, by omission,

⁷³ Wilson and Thompson, (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.2, South Africa 1860 -1966, p.500.

⁷⁴ DO 119, File 1182 (1955: Administration of the High Commission Territories), No.43, Extract from the Speech by the Minister of Native Affairs on the South African Constitutional Amendment Bill, 1956 Joint Sitting, 23 February 1956.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ File 1182, No. 41, Office of the High Commissioner, Cape Town - R.W.D. Fowler, CRO, 11 February 1956.

assume that "South African" was synonymous with "white South African" and thus failed entirely to take account of black South African hostility both to apartheid and the issue of transfer, but it revealed clearly the underlying policy on which the whole British approach to South Africa had been based since 1948 or earlier: namely, that of not antagonising the white government too much by criticising its race policies. This time the context was the protectorates issue. At other times, as we have seen, it was defence or economics or Commonwealth co-operation in general. But the seemingly firm British refusal to give way "at the present time" on transfer masked an even firmer determination not to allow this issue or any other to impair relations with the South Africans to the point of risking a complete break. This had been made clear during the Seretse crisis by the Labour government of the time. The Conservatives were just as determined. As Liesching put it to a meeting of CRO officials in January 1956, "We should never reject a request from the Union to discuss the problems of the Territories but we should, as in the past, do our best to avoid a head-on collision".⁷⁷

At that same meeting in January 1956 Lord Home had wondered how long Britain would be able to maintain its "apparently negative attitude" in the face of South African demands for transfer. He was answered by one official who thought the "governing factors" were "the British provision of capital for the Union and British defence assistance". Transfer, although not practicable for South Africa, was "a permanent plank in the Government's platform for prestige reasons".⁷⁸ Liesching then predicted (correctly as it turned out) that Strijdom would raise the issue at the next prime ministers' meeting or before the next general election. However, he felt that Strijdom was "astute" enough to realise that Britain would not agree and that he would not pursue the matter to the point of a "real clash". The agreement over Simonstown and the

⁷⁷ Ibid., No. 38A, Minutes of Meeting at CRO, 26 January 1956.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

support given by Britain at UNO to South Africa had "helped greatly to ease relations between the Union and the United Kingdom". It was clear therefore, added Lord Home, that Britain should continue with its "rather negative attitude" and that no initiatives concerning transfer could take place until the Union's policies "were such as to persuade the African inhabitants that transfer was desirable".

In May 1956, before the prime ministers' meeting, the high commissioner's office in Cape Town had telegraphed the CRO with some surprisingly defeatist thoughts concerning the future of the territories.⁷⁹ It was felt that preparing counter-measures to sanctions by South Africa would be "unrealistic". Such measures would primarily be directed against "HMG" (Her Majesty's Government) and if "HMG" were not in a position to bring "massive pressure" to bear on the Union government it would have to recognise "frankly" that "in certain circumstances the Territories will be unable to resist Union pressure and will have to be abandoned". Again, the advice was tendered to the effect that, instead of counter-measures, moves towards greater self-sufficiency should be adopted or, alternatively, if South Africa were to impose sanctions "the situation could only be restored by such counter-pressure by the UK government as would be strong enough and well-enough directed to make the Union abandon their measures".

At the June prime ministers' meeting, Strijdom, as was noted earlier in this section, did raise the question of transfer and was duly rebuffed (if somewhat politely) by the British. The official statement mentioned that the position of the British government was restated "and agreement was not reached".⁸⁰ Die Burger then reported that although there was disappointment in political circles ("teleurstelling in politieke kringe") over the

⁷⁹ File 1204, No. 21, T.V. Scrivenor, Cape Town - R.W.D. Fowler, CRO, 23 May 1956.

⁸⁰ The Star, 5 July 1956.

failed negotiations there was no "despair".⁸¹ "We will try and try again", and the government "would not let the matter rest". The public were reminded that the British had earlier conceded to General Hertzog that "thorough consultation" with the inhabitants did not necessarily mean that their "permission" had to be given before transfer took place. This concession provided "hope" for the future.

The World, however, in commenting later in the year on the territories, expressed the gratitude of black South Africans to the British government for promising at "just the right time" that Basutoland and the other protectorates would only be incorporated in South Africa if the people of the territories "gave their consent".⁸² The promise would "serve to allay any fears that earlier discussions might have aroused".

There was, however, not much more that the British would hear of transfer from Strijdom's side officially. In May 1957 Strijdom was asked in parliament what the reaction of the government was to the fact that at the prime ministers' conference in the previous year it had emerged that South Africa and Britain were applying very different policies when it came to the high commission territories and the native reserves. The one was allowing white capital and expertise to develop the high commission territories while the other was refusing white capital and investment in the reserves. South Africa, it was pointed out, would have to spend at least as much on the reserves as Britain had on the high commission territories in order to justify their incorporation.⁸³

Strijdom, in one of his last statements on the protectorates issue, replied that the matter was of "great importance" to South Africa in terms of relations between South Africa and Britain

⁸¹ Die Burger, 9 July 1956.

⁸² The World, 13 October 1956.

⁸³ House of Assembly Debates, col.5620, 2 May 1957.

and in terms of "relations with the non-white races in southern Africa".⁸⁴ It was, he said, "a tragedy" that no South African prime minister had succeeded over the previous 48 years in getting transfer of the territories. He had raised the matter as had his predecessors and he had "put our case strongly but in a friendly way, without success". While he was alive he would tackle the case again "when the opportunity presented itself" and South Africa could "never abandon her attitude in this connection".

But, he continued, these were not matters to be discussed at a Commonwealth conference, rather a "matter of inter-governmental negotiation". It had nothing to do with the other Commonwealth countries.⁸⁵ He felt it was wrong of the British to apply different policies to those of South Africa in the territories in view of their possible future incorporation into South Africa and it was wrong of the British to say South Africa should not interfere. South Africa would treat the protectorates like her own "native" territories and would not allow "white" capital in.⁸⁶

In London discussion continued concerning the possible future motives and implications of South African policy towards the territories. In January 1958, for example, alarm bells were rung at the prospect of the issue being raised again just before the imminent South African general election. A cabinet memorandum stated that the forthcoming general election in South Africa in late April "may create new tensions" in relations between the National Party government and the United Kingdom.⁸⁷ Among the

⁸⁴ House of Assembly Debates, col.5272, 2 May 1957.

⁸⁵ Ibid., cols.5272-3, 2 May 1957.

⁸⁶ Ibid., col. 5273, 2 May 1957.

⁸⁷ PRO, CAB 129/91 (2 January - 25 February 1958), C.(58)12, "The High Commission Territories in South Africa", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 20 January 1958.

issues expected to provide Nationalist leaders with the raw material for "extreme statements" was the future of the high commission territories.

Two matters could be "blown up" for election purposes to proportions which, however unjustifiable, "might cause us a great deal of trouble". These were the development of minerals and railway communications in Swaziland, or defence facilities for Union forces in Bechuanaland and Basutoland. Regarding the former, it was suggested that a contracting bid by a South African firm (Anglo-American) together with a British consortium (led by Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds) be accepted despite the possibility it "may cause some controversy with a section of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons" and despite possible criticism that it would be "the thin [end of the] wedge to extend South African influence in Swaziland".⁸⁸

Similarly on the question of defence facilities in the high commission territories it was suggested that the cabinet should accept certain South African overflying rights and right of access to radar sites in Basutoland but that the emergency route requested for South Africa through Bechuanaland should be rejected. The latter would be "politically dangerous" since it went through Bamangwato territory. The memorandum warned, however, of a tough Union response to such a refusal. It could mean a possible "renunciation by the Union of the 1910 Customs Agreement". The territories "would not be able to retaliate". The Commonwealth secretary did not know if the warning was "too pessimistic", nor did he wish to suggest that Britain "should...be swayed by fears of possible Union action" but that it was "right to reckon with the possible consequences". Negotiations were to be kept going, however, "until the elections were over".

A year later, when Strijdom had died and had been succeeded by

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Verwoerd, the decision to reject the original South African request was communicated by the Commonwealth secretary to the high commissioner in Cape Town. He wrote:

The attention which the 1958 arrangements has aroused in Parliament here has confirmed our view that it would be politically unwise for you to accede to Mr Erasmus's request [to reconnoitre a new route via Martins Drift to Caprivi instead of the South West corner of the territory via Ghanzi and Gobabis].⁸⁹

South African protests that the British were being "unco-operative" were to be rejected. Their attempts to gain physical access to the territory were described as a "political manoeuvre designed either to obtain a footing in the territory or to embarrass us". But another less politically dangerous route through Bechuanaland could be approved, preferably the one via Ghanzi and Gobabis.

The background to this relatively strong rejection of South African interference in the territories was provided by the changes in policy towards them both in Britain and in South Africa at the end of the decade. In line with moves towards faster decolonisation in the rest of Africa, in 1958 the British had decided to grant Basutoland a fully elected legislative council, a move which heralded a new move to self-government for the territories. It also prompted one of the last angry reactions from the Strijdom government which had struggled to accept independent African colonies to the far north but which now felt threatened by such moves closer to home. Indian Opinion commented that their anger exposed "one more weakness of apartheid". It was not the friendship of the Africans that they [the Nationalists] wanted, claimed Indian Opinion; they were instead trying to

⁸⁹ DO 119, File 1205, No.2, Secretary of State, CRO - High Commissioner, Cape Town, 27 January 1959.

"neutralise the movement of a united front against apartheid throughout Africa".⁹⁰ Strijdom's earlier attempts to convince emergent Africa that he sincerely welcomed independence were now, it was claimed, proved to be false.

By that time, however, the question of transfer had become subsumed by the rapid decolonisation policy of the British government in Africa, which had, in turn, implications for the future independence of the high commission territories. This was also accompanied by a decisive change in policy from Verwoerd's side once he had succeeded Strijdom as prime minister. By 1959 Verwoerd had begun to recognise that the destiny of the territories did not lie in their transfer to the Union. Inevitably it marked the abandonment by South Africa of any further attempts to obtain the territories and instead a shift of emphasis towards the idea of a "constellation" of independent homelands and states, all of which would be politically and economically dependent on South Africa for the indefinite future.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Indian Opinion, 1 August 1958.

⁹¹ See Hyam, The Failure of South African Expansion, pp.194-198 and T.M. Shaw, "Southern Africa: Co-operation and Conflict in an International Sub-System", Journal of Modern African Studies (JMAS), Vol.12, -No.4, 1974, pp.633-655.

Chapter 12: Strijdom and Independent Africa(a) The changing Nationalist attitude to decolonisation

Closely linked to the issue of the high commission territories was the Nationalist attitude to British decolonisation policies in Africa. Britain's moves towards granting independence to territories in West and East Africa were not as close to home as the later moves towards self-government in high commission territories such as Basutoland, moves which, as we have seen, occasioned considerable unease in South Africa. Nevertheless, it was during Strijdom's premiership that the significant change in emphasis occurred concerning South Africa's attitude to independent black states to the north. It did not happen at once and the moves to welcome such states within the Commonwealth were somewhat hesitant and grudging at first. Eric Louw's groundbreaking speech at Pretoria University in 1957 (in which he welcomed independent Africa in return for non-interference in each other's internal affairs)¹ took place some three years after Strijdom's accession to power.

Even after the recognition of Ghana and its acceptance by South Africa into the Commonwealth, National Party voices continued to criticise the speed and manner in which Britain was proceeding with its decolonisation policy and continued to predict dire consequences for South Africa from such a policy. There were indications, also, of much soul-searching over the question of diplomatic exchanges and the possible establishment of a "guest-house" for foreign black diplomats in Pretoria. Louw advocated a policy of "festina lente" ("make haste slowly") and admitted that white opinion would have to be prepared for such changes.²

Essentially the Nationalist change in attitude to independent African states could be explained as tactical rather than

¹ Miller, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, p.133.

² Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.13.

ideological. As Seiler points out, it was only during the late 1950's, in reaction to heightened attacks on South Africa's domestic policies, that the South African government began to elaborate a coherent foreign, defence and development policy.³ Up until then the basic preoccupation of the Nationalists was with what Seiler terms "a continuing, inward preoccupation with the achievement and consolidation of power".⁴

Louw's new Africa policy can thus be placed in the context of what Seiler calls a need to "redefine the situation" facing South Africa. A redefinition was a necessary response to "external stimuli" which were the "threats and opportunities" existing in the external environment confronting South Africa. One such threat was the existence of potentially hostile black states which would join an already existing alliance of anti-apartheid and anti-colonial countries headed by India. On the other hand, the "opportunity" was provided by indications that such states could be induced to modify or lessen their hostility towards South Africa if South Africa were to profess a genuine desire to be friendly and to promise rewards in terms of trade and technical co-operation.

This approach could be tested first with Ghana whose relatively slow movement towards independence, as Miller points out,⁵ "allowed for considerable speculation about what attitude South Africa would take". As we have seen, Malan had expressed his displeasure as early as 1951 about the possibility of Commonwealth membership for Britain's ex-colonies and Britain had assured him that there would not be any admittance of new members without full consultation.⁶ The British approach had been to a

³ J. Seiler, "South African Perspectives and Responses to External Pressures", Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 13, No.3, 1975, pp. 448-9.

⁴ Ibid., p.448.

⁵ Miller, Survey, p.133.

⁶ See chapter 6, p.137.

large extent conditioned by South Africa's attitude although it had been made clear to Strijdom and Louw in 1955 that Britain would go ahead with or without South Africa's agreement to bring her colonies to independence.⁷ Even so, there continued to be considerable hesitation and speculation on the part of Britain about the South African attitude.

In September and December of 1955 the first public indications of a more congenial South African attitude to the possibility of independent black African states emerged during speeches made by Strijdom and Louw. In 1956, during the prime minister's vote, the opposition leader, Strauss, quoted Strijdom's and Louw's remarks in the course of a speech which essentially outlined the identity of views held by the UP and the NP on foreign policy.⁸ Strauss criticised Strijdom for having said in the previous session (1955) that whites should take joint action with their counterparts to the north to "protect the white heritage"; but then praised him for saying on 22 September 1955 that South Africa should not act towards the non-white countries as if they were enemies but should instead co-operate, consult and express friendship towards them. He also praised Eric Louw for saying the same on 31 December 1955, in the course of an announcement of changes in the organisation of the department of external affairs. He now asked Strijdom to make a more comprehensive policy statement on the issue in the light of these indications of a policy change.

Strijdom's reply expressed gratification for Strauss's desire for "one voice" on foreign affairs and also claimed that "any sensible person" would see the need for the white communities of Africa to "stand together".⁹ At the same time, however, it stood to reason that South Africa "should not make enemies of black

⁷ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.326-328 and p.400.

⁸ House of Assembly Debates, cols.4097-8, 23 April, 1956.

⁹ Ibid., col.4104, 23 April 1956.

states to the north" and that his aim, as he had said the previous year, was, "nations and governments acknowledging and respecting each other's right to exist....There is a place in Africa for White states and there is a place for non-White states."

These statements were noted by the British who saw them as evidence of a change of attitude by South Africa towards Commonwealth membership of independent African states. On 28 November 1955 a memorandum by the Commonwealth secretary, Home, suggested that the British high commissioner, Liesching, pave the way for a meeting with Strijdom during the 1956 conference of prime ministers, on the Gold Coast issue.

All our experience suggests that a relatively long time must be allowed for domestic consideration if the Union Government are to be brought to accept or acquiesce in a proposition so inherently distasteful to them.¹⁰

However, Strijdom's "recent statements" honouring the right of Non-European states in Africa were seen "by some" as a "softening of the Union's approach to the Gold Coast question" and "partially opened the door" to such a British approach. Liesching had told Home that a "personal" approach should be made in mid-December in which he could deploy some of the arguments most likely to secure a favourable response from the "Afrikaner mind" and to elicit enough reaction to carry the matter further. He could then bring Strijdom's views and his own impressions of first contacts with Strijdom to London. It was also advised that the opposition leader, Strauss, be informed in "strict confidence" of how matters were developing "in order to prevent the latter taking up an attitude which might be embarrassing to

¹⁰ PRO, CAB 129/78 (14 October - 31 December 1955), C.P.(55)182, "Commonwealth Membership: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 28 November 1955.

us through ignorance of how things stand".

On 1 December the British cabinet discussed this memorandum and Home reiterated his argument about preparing for the 1956 meeting with Strijdom.¹¹ He noted that the South African government appeared to be "less rigid" concerning the issue of an independent Gold Coast. The colonial secretary, A. Lennox-Boyd, then noted that the Gold Coast would probably have self-government by the end of 1956 or "at the latest" not before mid 1957. Anthony Eden, the prime minister, stated his opinion that it would be preferable if the question of admittance to Commonwealth membership did not have to be considered at the June 1956 Commonwealth conference and that it "would not be altogether disadvantageous" if discussions about constitutional development in the Gold Coast should take some further time.

In discussion, strong approval was expressed for the general ruling that, in the context of Commonwealth membership, it was desirable that the term "full self-government" should be used instead of the word "independence" since the latter implied that the constitutional development of the colonial territories entailed the probability that they would "secede from the Commonwealth" and it might give unnecessary encouragement to this idea". The cabinet then authorised Liesching's approach and also decided to discontinue all reference to "independence" and rather to use "full self-government" in reference to constitutional development of colonial territories.

Liesching reported back on his meeting with Strijdom and Louw in a letter of 13 December 1955 and noted that he had successfully broken the news of Britain's intention to introduce Ghana to the Commonwealth,¹² despite Strijdom's lack of enthusiasm at the idea of a "native state" being given precedence over the Rhodesian

¹¹ CAB 128/129, C.M. (55)44, 5, "Commonwealth Membership", 1 December 1955.

¹² Reported in Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.400-401.

Federation. It was Liesching's argument that Ghana could fall into communist hands or the Bandung group that had clinched the matter (rather like the argument in relation to India seven years earlier, which had persuaded Malan and Smuts).

In January of the following year (1956), as a follow up to Louw's December speech, there was further evidence of South African movement on the issue. The World reported that Dr J.P. Bruwer of Stellenbosch University had stated that African diplomats who came to South Africa "should not be put up in backyards".¹³ In an editorial entitled "Right is Right", the editor of The World congratulated the government for showing "a markedly different attitude" to that of an earlier period when the British announcement of self-government for the Gold Coast had been greeted by South Africa "with anger".

The need for friendship between South Africa and the emergent states is the "right thing". We congratulate the heads of this land on their courage to face facts and to be statesmanlike.

At the same time however the editor noted the decision by an international science conference to abandon South Africa as their venue because of the treatment of Non-White delegates. This "should not be allowed to recur" and South Africa "should have the courage to face questions that may in future be raised by the Black States whom she wishes to befriend".

In London, meanwhile, at a meeting of officials at the CRO about the high commission territories¹⁴, it was reported that the permanent under-secretary of state had had talks with the South African high commissioner, Jooste. The latter had reportedly admitted that South Africa would have to recognise the

¹³ The World, 28 January 1956.

¹⁴ DO 119, File 1182, No.38A, 26 January 1956.

independent African states such as the Gold Coast and Niger but that the high commission territories were "a problem". This had prompted Liesching to make his remark about the need to avoid a "head-on collision" with South Africa over the territories. Liesching had previously explained the change in the South African attitude to the Gold Coast as a realisation that it was the best way of warding off communist influence in Africa and that South Africa now understood Britain's protective role for South Africa and the inevitability of constitutional advance in British Territories.¹⁵

As the year progressed the South African attitude became ever clearer. In February South Africa House issued a pamphlet entitled "Co-operative Coexistence in Africa" which welcomed co-operation with independent or self-governing states to the north but which stressed the vital importance of non-interference by states in each other's affairs.¹⁶ During the external affairs vote in April Strijdom, as we have seen, welcomed co-operation with black Africa while still declaring the need for whites to stand together.

In June 1956, when the Commonwealth conference was in progress, The World reported that the admission of British West African territories to independence and Commonwealth membership would be discussed but that the attitude of Strijdom "could only be guessed at".¹⁷ However it was likely to be "more reasonable" than that of Malan as was evidenced by the Union's quick recognition of Sudan's independence (according to Vale, Louw was proud that South Africa had been the first to congratulate Sudan).¹⁸ By his "very presence" at the conference Strijdom was demonstrating that he was "ready to deal with non-Europeans outside the Union on a

¹⁵ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.329.

¹⁶ Miller, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, p.133.

¹⁷ The World, 30 June 1956

¹⁸ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.337.

basis of complete equality". In London he sat at the same table as the prime ministers of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, "all men of colour" and he would soon be sitting with Dr Nkrumah of the Gold Coast when that country became independent in the Commonwealth. No decision about the matter was likely at the conference, The World noted, as:

The purpose of such a conference is not to make joint decisions on the spot but to discuss the world situation from the point of view of that great free association of free nations, the Commonwealth, which used to be called British but which is becoming less British every year.

In July The Star reported that Strijdom and Lord Malvern (prime minister of the Rhodesian Federation) were giving "serious attention" at the Commonwealth conference to the question of admitting new members to the Commonwealth and that it would come up again in discussions in Downing Street.¹⁹ It was reported that Gold Coast would be given a date for "self-government" after the forthcoming general elections in the territory. Strijdom had earlier told the Senate that the South African government could not possibly interfere in Britain's affairs when it came to the Gold Coast but still might have a say when an attempt was made to include any country in the Commonwealth which the Union did not think was "sufficiently developed" for membership.²⁰

It is clear, however, that by July or August 1956 or perhaps even earlier the Nationalist cabinet had decided to abandon any thought of public opposition to the idea of independent African states joining the Commonwealth. Perhaps Liesching's talks with Strijdom and Louw in December 1955 or the informal discussions in London during the prime ministers' conference in June and July

¹⁹ The Star, 2 July 1957.

²⁰ Ibid.

of 1956 were crucial in this regard. At any rate, the announcement of Ghana's imminent independence elicited no public opposition from the South African government and at the special Commonwealth conference held in London in June 1957 it was unanimously decided to admit the newly independent state to Commonwealth membership. South Africa publicly welcomed the new state to independence and Louw promptly sent the head of the newly created Africa division of the department of external affairs to Accra for the independence celebrations on 6 March. There, promises of friendship and co-operation in the economic and technical fields were announced and Nkrumah praised South Africa's technical and scientific development as important for all of Africa.²¹

(b) The "honeymoon" ends: local and international reactions to Strijdom's Africa policy

As some writers have pointed out, the honeymoon in relations between South Africa and Africa, Ghana in particular, did not last long. It soon became clear that neither government would abandon bedrock political principles for the sake of diplomatic friendship.²² South Africa refused to modify apartheid for the sake of international opinion and continued to hope for British and Commonwealth support in its domestic jurisdiction argument. Ghana and the other African states which later joined the Commonwealth

while asserting domestic jurisdiction in their own cases and especially against one another, regarded South African racial policy as affecting the whole of Africa and therefore 'international' rather than

²¹ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.407.

²² See, for example, Vale, pp.407-8, Miller, Survey, pp.134-5.

domestic.²³

Increasingly, as we shall see in following chapters, the newly-independent African states began to take the lead in challenging South Africa's policies both within the Commonwealth and outside of it. Miller notes that while South Africa could still rely on Britain "not to fling aside all the economic and strategic advantages of its association with South Africa in order to please new members" it could not rely on her "active support".²⁴ Certainly this was the case after Sharpeville and was demonstrated at the conferences of 1960 and 1961. India, Australia and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand also continued to support the domestic jurisdiction argument but mainly because the plea remained important to them for other reasons.

Within South Africa, black opinion welcomed Ghana's independence and admission to the Commonwealth and was cautiously approving at first of Strijdom's diplomacy. This quickly turned sour as it turned out that welcoming Ghana did not mean any modification of apartheid at home and did not even lead to an immediate exchange of diplomats. The refusal by Strijdom's government to take up invitations to political conferences in Ghana (usually on the grounds that colonial powers were not also invited) was taken as another sign of the government's lack of sincerity, as was Strijdom and Louw's negative response in 1958 to constitutional developments in Basutoland.²⁵

In June 1957, Liberation, one of the Congress Alliance monthly journals, attacked the Nationalist Party's approach to Ghana as "grudging" and "reluctant", noting that the NP had been forced to recognise a new force in world politics, the Afro-Asian

²³ Miller, Survey, p.135.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See above p.266.

bloc.²⁶ It described South Africa as the "weakest link" in the "imperialist" chain, unable to count on imperialist aid because strategically South Africa lay outside "the main cockpits of a new anti-Communist war". In April the same journal had stated that it "echoed the joy felt by Ghanaians" at their independence and that this now marked the beginning of the end for imperialism and white domination "from the Sahara to Cape Town...and the declining power of British imperialism".²⁷

The Empire is vanishing; it has all but disappeared; and the so-called "Commonwealth" which is supposed to replace it is becoming more and more of a myth.

At the ANC national conference of the same year (1957) Ghana was welcomed as "the first independent Africa state freed directly from British Imperialism". The "enemies of national independence" were criticised as those who were now trying to find evidence to deny other countries in Africa independence by describing Nkrumah as a "dictator".²⁸

Ghana's independence

had a profound effect on the racist theories of our Nationalist government. Once more the protagonists of apartheid have found themselves in a dilemma of pursuing their racialistic policy in South Africa and being compelled to accept the "Black States" as an equal.

²⁶ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box H, b (Publications, Periodicals), Liberation, No.20, August 1956, pp.6-7.

²⁷ Ibid., Liberation, No. 24, April 1957, pp.1-2.

²⁸ AD 2186, B a 4 (45th Annual Conference of the ANC, Orlando 1957), Report of the National Executive Committee, pp.1-5.

Strijdom's refusal to accept an invitation to a proposed Pan-African conference to be hosted by Nkrumah the following year was also noted. The excuse used had been that the European colonial powers were not invited. The report noted, "This reveals the imperialistic attitude of the South African Government".²⁹

Indian Opinion also found cause to rejoice in Ghana's independence and in the fact that Ghana would head the anti-apartheid movement.³⁰ Ghana's admission would mean "a voice in the Commonwealth against continued colonial rule". Nkrumah had offered asylum to any African "who considers himself persecuted by colonial or any other authorities".³¹ Noted with approval also was the statement in India by the British Labour party spokesman, Aneurin Bevan, that Nigeria, Malaya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Kenya were to join the Commonwealth soon.³² It would be "foolish", Bevan was quoted as saying, for India to withdraw from the Commonwealth just as Ghana was joining and he predicted that India's influence within the Commonwealth would soon transcend that of the "metropolitan power".

On 3 May Indian Opinion reported that Nkrumah had "declared war on apartheid".³³ He had reportedly appointed a committee to look into the memorandum of the anti-apartheid campaigner, Reverend Michael Scott, who had accused South Africa of defying the world over apartheid and South West Africa. The memorandum had stated that a "plan of action" would have to be devised "which will achieve what moral persuasion and ten years of debates and attempted conciliation in the United Nations have failed to achieve". In the same issue an editorial entitled "Nkrumah, Strijdom and the Funkhole" noted Strijdom's refusal to attend a

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Indian Opinion, 8 March 1957.

³¹ Ibid., 29 March 1957

³² Ibid., 12 April 1957

³³ Ibid., 3 May 1957.

conference of sovereign independent states the following year (the Pan-African conference) and also his statement to the effect that he personally would not attend the June Commonwealth conference which would decide on Ghana's admission to the Commonwealth (Eric Louw was to be sent instead). This, said the editor, would confirm the impression that "the Union's premier thinks he will solve ugly problems by continually running into his funkhole".

On the other hand, Indian Opinion approved Strijdom's "tangible demonstration of goodwill" to Ghana on independence day, 6 March, and his not standing in the way of Ghana's Commonwealth membership.³⁴ This, said the editor, had made "some impression" in Ghana notwithstanding Nkrumah's speech on the same day to the effect that he "hated and loathed apartheid". Nkrumah could have gone to UNO and excited the whole world against South Africa but instead had reciprocated with a friendly invitation to Strijdom to attend the Pan-African conference, although the topics for discussion would include race problems and dependent territories. Strijdom had declined the invitation with the excuse that the scope of the conference was too narrow and that if it were more broadly based with representatives of the colonial powers he would attend. This, said Indian Opinion was a "strong point in Mr Strijdom's favour" as "his government was not alone in preaching race oppression in Africa".

Indian Opinion reported in July that during the Commonwealth conference which had met to decide on Ghana's membership Eric Louw had invited Nkrumah to lunch and that this was the first ministerial level meeting between representatives of South Africa and Ghana.³⁵ It reportedly took place at the Dorchester Hotel after the morning session of the prime ministers conference at No. 10 Downing Street. Louw was accompanied by G.P. Jooste, the South African secretary of external affairs and Nkrumah by

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Indian Opinion, 5 July 1957.

Kojo Botsio, the Ghanaian minister of trade and labour. Louw informed SAPA's correspondent that the discussion he had had with Nkrumah "had been very interesting and most constructive" and that it had been arranged towards the end of the previous week.

Whether the above-mentioned demonstrations of goodwill were planned simply as public relations exercises by the South Africans or whether they were genuine attempts to start off on a good footing in relations with Africa's first independent Commonwealth member remains to be discovered. However, it does seem that "moderate" non-European organs of opinion were to a certain extent impressed by such demonstrations. Taken together with reported statements from government which seemed to indicate some hesitancy at the time about future apartheid laws, there was enough evidence to give the impression in some quarters of an imminent turn-around in Nationalist race policy. Louw had been reported by Indian Opinion as saying in London that he was not sure if South Africa would introduce more apartheid legislation.³⁶ This was interpreted as "a retreat by apartheid in the face of mounting world hostility to race oppression" and there was "talk" of Verwoerd being "kicked out of Native Affairs to Finance" as proof of the effects of world-wide condemnation.

An article of 2 August in Indian Opinion by Jordan Ngubane, the anti-ANC Liberal leader, had praised Louw's announcement that South Africa would welcome Ghana's ambassador in Pretoria and had described it as having required "courage and intelligence".³⁷ Taken together with statements by "a certain Mr Van Heerden, one of the topmost brains in Afrikaner journalism and one who holds

³⁶ Indian Opinion, 28 June 1957.

³⁷ Indian Opinion, 2 August 1957. In an article by Brian Bunting in New Age, the Congress of Democrats (COD) newsletter, on the black press in South Africa, Indian Opinion was firmly identified as a "mouthpiece of the anti-Congress Jordan Ngubane of the Liberal Party" and was by implication placed in the same camp as the "capitalistic" white-owned newspapers such as Bantu World, Ilanga and Imvo Zabantsundu. (Brian Bunting, "Who Runs our Newspapers? The Story behind the Non-white Press", New Age, 4 December 1959, pp.1-9).

a key position in the Strijdom chain of papers" there was indication of "growing fissions" with the "potential to be ultimately splits on fundamentals". Van Heerden had reportedly advised Afrikaners that it was time they "discarded outmoded concepts". An article in Die Burger quoting an "important, influential" Afrikaner pleading for more "social equality" was further evidence of "some hope for the future".

Ultimately, of course, these hopes were to be dashed and the uncompromising policies of the Nationalists continued to be asserted with a vengeance in the months which followed the recognition of Ghana's Commonwealth membership. While in June Indian Opinion was arguing for a let up in the sanctions applied by India since 1947 against South Africa³⁸ in the same month protests were mounting against an apartheid bill which intended to separate white and black nurses in the same way as the "Separate Universities" bill was proposing to do for students and academics. Louw had in any case made it clear on his return from London that while the Nationalist policy was to "extend the hand of friendship" to newly independent states it was also to inform them that "our policy is a policy which is founded on the basis of separation, but at the same time on justice towards the Non-White races".³⁹ Diplomatic representation would have to be considered "carefully" and the government could not act "over-hastily". The subject of a guest-house for diplomats "bristles with... difficulties...We are living in a country where certain conceptions have taken root, and have been here for ages", he said, "you cannot change them overnight".⁴⁰

³⁸ Indian Opinion, 7 June 1957.

³⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.7669, 10 June 1957.

⁴⁰ Ibid., col.7670, 10 June 1957.

Chapter 13. The Suez Crisis, the Economy(a) Introduction

As has been pointed out at the beginning of this section, the Suez crisis of 1956 did not affect South Africa's official relations with Britain to any significant extent although it did have the effect of calling into question Britain's commitment to the Commonwealth in general. In the sense, therefore, that Commonwealth bonds were weakened by British failure to consult the Commonwealth and by the display of Commonwealth disunity engendered by Suez it can be argued that South Africa's Commonwealth relations were indirectly affected.

The official white opposition party in South Africa concentrated its attack on the Strijdom government for not coming out publicly in favour of the British actions in Suez but stopped short of demanding that South African troops should have actively assisted the British. However, this position, as was shown by the events and repercussions of the crisis, proved to be untenable and unrealistic. When "white" Commonwealth countries with greater histories of loyalty to Britain such as Canada could come out publicly against the British/French actions then South Africa's position of neutrality, although adopted for different reasons, seemed in retrospect more reasonable. As the disastrous repercussions of the event in terms of Commonwealth relations in general became more and more apparent to all who witnessed them, so parties like the UP could only have come to the conclusion that they would have to reassess their priorities and loyalties. It could be argued that Suez represented one more milestone towards a white consensus on foreign affairs and that it weakened English South African resolve to remain a monarchy and to remain in the Commonwealth.

As far as extra-parliamentary opinion is concerned the effects of the crisis were even more serious. It was mentioned at the beginning of this section that the ANC and its Congress allies

unequivocally condemned the British/French action and called into question the whole basis of the Commonwealth connection for South Africa. Describing the attack on Egypt variously as an act of "naked aggression", as "imperialistic" and as "racist" or "anti-African", African and Indian opinion expressed their revulsion at the attack and their dire forebodings for the future of British relations with its colonies and former colonies. Taken together with criticism of the way Britain handled the Seretse affair and the way Britain seemed to be colluding with apartheid by supporting South Africa at the UNO, it seems as if the Suez crisis was a watershed in black feelings towards Britain. As one commentator noted in reference to Canada, it was like finding a "beloved uncle arrested for rape".¹ Or as The World, quoted earlier, remarked, "She [Britain] has lost her prestige among Afro-Asian peoples and nations...they are no longer for Britain".²

(b) The South African response to Suez

It has been noted by one commentator that the Suez crisis represented the other facet of the Nationalist government's relations with the Commonwealth - the facet of "frustration and resentment".³ The government displayed a "cool" attitude to Britain over the crisis despite the opposition clamour for support and it abstained on the UN vote condemning the invasion. The motives for this stance were various and included South Africa's suspicions of Israel's attempts to build up its relations in Africa.⁴ The main motive, however, say Barber and Barratt, was, as Strijdom put it at the time, to keep South

¹ J.T. Saywell, "Canada and the Commonwealth", Dept. of History, University of Toronto (Canadian Institute of International Affairs), Paper presented to the 6th Commonwealth Unofficial Relations Conference, Palmerston North, New Zealand (SAIIA, Jan Smuts House), January 1959, p.4.

² The World, 17 November 1956

³ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.60.

⁴ Ibid., p.61.

Africa's head "out of the beehive".⁵ In other words, Strijdom's government wanted to avoid entangling South Africa in something that could have adversely affected its relations with the ex-colonies of Africa and was in any case averse to getting involved in Britain's wars - as had been the party's policy for decades before. Furthermore, the breakdown in communication "infuriated Louw" and ended up embarrassing the UP opposition and the British high commissioner, Liesching, who had to try to defend the British action publicly.

But, as Barber and Barratt put it, "Pretoria's attitude during the Suez crisis reflected more a judgement on Britain's ham-fisted policy, than any desire to remain uncommitted".⁶ Soon after the crisis was over, the Nationalists started criticising the Afro-Asian bloc again and Egypt's ties to the USSR. Verwoerd later argued it was a mistake for the UK to withdraw from Suez. This, say Barratt and Barber, was "characteristic" of the Nationalist government's view of the Commonwealth. It wanted an anti-communistic Commonwealth and one which brooked no interference in internal affairs of member states - and it did not want the Commonwealth to become an instrument of decolonisation despite the relatively welcoming stance adopted by Strijdom and Louw to African independent states.

J.D.B. Miller places the Suez crisis in the context of the changing nature of the "Commonwealth System"⁷ - the Commonwealth's evolution from a closely knit and like-minded grouping of states in the 1930's and 1940's to a much more diverse and loose association of the late 1950's and beyond. By 1960 it was recognised that the most obvious change in the Commonwealth system was the fact that "serious differences of

⁵ Quoted in Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.61.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Miller, Survey, ch.18, "A Commonwealth System?", pp.409-429.

policy divided the members in international affairs, and that the system of consultation was now partial and selective rather than general".⁸ The Suez affair was but one example of the "substantial change in Commonwealth consultation" by the latter part of the 1950's. Even before Suez, India's non-alignment had cut it off from the "frank exchange of intelligence information which was common between Britain, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand".⁹ There was already a "basic dichotomy" between those who were fully accepted within the US alliance system (making Pakistan an "equivocal" factor because of its importance to the anti-communist Baghdad Pact agreement) and those who were outside of it altogether.

It could be argued that South Africa, like Pakistan, but for different reasons, also remained an "equivocal factor" because of its reluctance to get involved in any commitments in the Middle East and because of its racial policies. At any rate the specific failure of the Commonwealth system of consultation during the Suez crisis was much wider than Miller seems to suggest for in reality no Commonwealth country was consulted, not even those fully integrated into the US alliance system.

As another commentator has noted, "the Suez affair became the most glaring failure of Commonwealth consultation".¹⁰ Australia and New Zealand were the only countries that seemed to be "in step" with Britain (although they were also not consulted). Robert Menzies the Australian premier played a major role in the efforts to negotiate with Egypt. Sidney Holland of New Zealand declared his country would stand by Britain "through thick and thin...New Zealand goes and stands where the motherland goes and stands".¹¹ But Canada was most "dismayed" and India "indignant".

⁸ Ibid., p.412.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ W.D. McIntyre, Colonies Into Commonwealth (London, Blandford Press, 1968), p.349.

¹¹ Ibid.

Canadians had objected from the start to the idea of using military force against Egypt and when the British/French bombardment and invasion began without consultation, the Canadian minister of external affairs, Lester Pearson, pointed out that Canada was no longer "a colonial chore boy running around shouting ready, aye ready".¹² However, Pearson did then play an active part in setting up the UN force that entered the Canal zone after the British withdrawal. He was alarmed that the forcible condemnations of Britain by India and Pakistan (to a lesser extent, Ceylon) could mean the possible disruption of the Commonwealth. By then New Zealand had had "second thoughts" about the initial "instinctive rallying to the mother country" and, together with Australia, also offered detachments to the UN (which were declined). It was soon after the Suez crisis that both Australia and New Zealand began to take a closer look at their relations with Asia and in New Zealand the election of a Labour government in 1957 was followed by a prolonged tour of Asia by the new premier, Walter Nash.

Thus the Suez war not only illustrated the diplomatic and military looseness of the modern Commonwealth. It forced the old Dominions to reconsider their own international goals.¹³

James Eayrs's very detailed account of the crisis gives a full picture both of the general breakdown of Commonwealth co-operation and consultation and of the specific nature of the responses by each Commonwealth country.¹⁴ A commentary on each stage of the crisis beginning with the nationalisation of the Canal by Egypt in July 1956 is followed by extracts from pertinent speeches and statements by politicians and parties in

¹² Quoted in McIntyre, Colonies into Commonwealth, p.350.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ James Eayrs (ed.), The Commonwealth and Suez. A Documentary Survey.

Commonwealth countries. The sections on South Africa's response are both relevant and complete concerning the reactions of the white government and opposition party and there is at least some mention made of the official statements by the leading extra-parliamentary political grouping, the ANC. All that needs to be added, perhaps, is a summary of some further newspaper commentary from the leading organs of black opinion.

When the canal was nationalised, the South African government, as Eayrs points out, greeted events very differently to the other "Old Dominions".¹⁵ Strijdom's reaction was one of "conflicting emotions". On the one hand he was worried about the possible effects of Nasser's brand of Pan-Arabic nationalism on the rest of Africa but on the other hand he felt there was the danger that intervention against Egypt might abrogate the important principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. Moreover he could gain little politically by rushing to Britain's side in the conflict. South Africa would not in any case suffer from the closure of the canal. Instead she would gain extra revenue and bargaining power.¹⁶ Australia and New Zealand, however, would experience a grave economic threat. It would be more profitable for South Africa to keep pressing for a NATO-style security organisation for Africa to hold communism at bay. Thus Strijdom's initial and perhaps "reflexive" statement of 27 July reported in the Cape Times:

We are on friendly terms with the various States in that part of the world and cannot favour one at the expense of another...it is best to keep our heads out of the beehive...But the Middle East, which has always been a dangerous spot, is of the utmost importance to South Africa as geographically it is the gateway to this

¹⁵ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.17.

continent.¹⁷

A few days later Eric Louw issued a statement describing the nationalisation as "a domestic affair of Egypt's in which South Africa would not presume to intervene" followed by a hasty modification the next day to the effect that while South Africa's government was determined not to become involved, it was neither unconcerned nor indifferent.¹⁸ Egypt, which still had diplomatic relations with South Africa, was contacted via its ambassador, in order to urge it to avoid any breach of the 1888 Convention (allowing all states unhindered use of the canal). The UP opposition leader, Strauss, who seemed to have accepted uncritically Anthony Eden's views of Nasser, made a statement on 9 August in parliament demanding solidarity with

all those whose aims are to maintain the Suez Canal as an open, international gateway, not subject to the arbitrary whims of a dictator reverting to the methods of Fascism...This is no local issue. The call of the Egyptian State Radio to the people of Africa to throw off an imaginary "yoke of imperialism" is an ominous warning that we in South Africa cannot afford to blind ourselves to the intolerant extremism of Egypt's new nationalistic regime.¹⁹

He went on to link events in Egypt with the "expansionist policies of the communist states" and criticised the government's lack of support for Britain. An editorial of the Cape Times noted on 21 August that "The Nats are far more interested in making it clear that they don't want to fight Britain's wars than in throwing in their moral weight strongly on the side of the

¹⁷ Ibid., p.62.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.17.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.65-66.

West.²⁰

But, as Eayrs points out, the "overwhelming majority" of South Africans, those without the vote, sided with Egypt. A key reason, furthermore, why the ANC supported Egypt during the Suez crisis was that its ally, the South African Communist Party, was pro-Soviet. The ANC statement of 27 September stated:

The threats of war against Egypt, the mobilisation of armies and the actual transportation of troops and dispatching of battleships to the Mediterranean by the British Government, are a clear indication of the determination of these governments to maintain their decaying colonial systems in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, by brutal force and through military terrorism. We pledge our solidarity with the Egyptian people and are confident that the people of Africa will not allow themselves to be used against their fellow Africans in any predatory way.²¹

Further evidence of black support for Egypt (and praise for the Soviet Union for intervening on Egypt's side against Britain and France) was to come later, as the crisis developed.

In the meantime, the Nationalist government's non-committal stance was being demonstrated as negotiations were pursued in London over a proposed Canal Users' Association. Strijdom decided not to press for representation at the London conference and neither South Africa nor Canada were invited because they were not principal users of the canal. The UP opposition argued that South Africa should have been there as there was no African state other than Egypt and Ethiopia to argue "from an African point of view".²²

²⁰ Quoted in Eayrs, p.17.

²¹ Quoted in Eayrs, p.66.

²² Eayrs, The Commonwealth and Suez, p.83.

In August Strijdom stated in parliament that "Our actions must be such as not to make enemies of the 200 million non-whites on the continent of Africa....In view of these facts ...[I] hope very strongly ...an acceptable agreement will be reached which will obviate friction in the future."²³ On 5 October Louw stated that the government found nothing illegal in the Egyptian decision to nationalise the canal company but hoped the 1888 Convention would be observed.²⁴

Having thus stated South Africa's neutral position in the crisis, it was simply a question of waiting for matters to develop. Secretly, Britain, France and Israel went ahead with plans to attack Egypt while negotiations continued in London. The American foreign secretary, Dulles, had made it clear to Eden that the United States opposed any forceful resolution of the situation but the British, despite initial hesitation, went ahead with their joint action plan which precluded any possibility of consultation with Commonwealth allies. On 31 October the British and French ultimatum to Egypt (and Israel) was sent while the Israelis, according to plan, advanced towards the canal having easily overrun Egyptian forces in Sinai.

As Eayrs points out, most white South Africans were in favour of the initial Israeli pre-emptive strike against Egypt, more so than in the rest of the Commonwealth, and he ascribes this partly to the relatively large and influential Jewish population in South Africa.²⁵ There was also something "in common between the outlook of the Afrikaner and the Zionist which predisposed many more South Africans than these to favour Israel in her warfare with her Arab neighbours". But the involvement of Britain in the war produced "something of a conflict of loyalties" for NP supporters. It was not in their nature to rally to the British

²³ Quoted in Eayrs, p.141.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p.188.

side.²⁶ "Prudence quickly reinforced habit...The bees were now swarming around the hive." The NP government was now more than ever resolved to keep a distance. At UNO South Africa's representative pleaded lack of time and information in order to excuse himself from the voting on a ceasefire resolution of 2 November.

In Pretoria cabinet delayed consideration of the crisis until 5 November. Then after the cabinet meeting, Louw issued a statement expressing South Africa's belief that it was "not involved" in the hostilities although it was "deeply concerned" about maintenance of peace in the Middle East.²⁷ He hoped a solution would be found and that "hostilities will remain limited and localised". Die Transvaler took a similar stand, saying South Africa should stand aside from the Egypt/Israel dispute as well as the British/French action.²⁸ But when it became clear that this action was not succeeding, Die Transvaler lost its "pose of neutrality" and stated on 5 November that failure "would without a doubt bring catastrophe to the West".²⁹

The United Party made its stance clear even before the government did. Strauss's statement of 2 November dissociated the UP from "harsh condemnation directed at Britain and France".³⁰ Britain had been provoked and the UP could only applaud the British response. "The aggressor is not always he who fires the first shot". Most English South African newspapers said much the same but the Cape Times in an editorial of 1 November criticised Britain and France for having weakened the UNO by their unilateral resort to force. They had also, it argued, weakened the force of the "Free World's" criticism of what Soviet Russia

²⁶ Ibid., p.189.

²⁷ Ibid., p.189.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

was doing in Hungary.³¹

It was at this point in the crisis that South Africa's concerns about the lack of consultation by Britain in the Commonwealth context emerged. In his first statement of 31 October Louw stressed that there had been a complete lack of forewarning from London and that he had learnt of the British ultimatum from a news broadcast over the SABC. When he phoned the prime minister, Strijdom, he found him to be just as much in the dark.³² Three days later Louw issued a further statement which said that the absence of consultation "would seem to indicate a major change of policy" on the part of the UK government" and that the failure to consult absolved South Africa from any responsibility in the event of a wider conflict.³³ This evidently upset the British high commissioner, Liesching, who, Eayrs claims, remained a true believer in the "gospel of consultation at all costs". Liesching sought out Louw on 4 November to offer an explanation of the extenuating circumstances which had led to such a lapse. Louw replied on 5 November in a letter of which only the final paragraph was made public. It read as follows:

In this connection, I would remind you that while the Union Government could reasonably have expected to be taken into the confidence of your Government in regard to a proposal which involved risk of a Middle East conflagration, and even a Third World War, the South African Premier, Mr. Strijdom, made it clear to you that it was, of course, for the United Kingdom Government to decide whether or not the circumstances required a departure from the procedure of consultation, or of giving prior

³¹ Ibid., p.190.

³² Ibid., p.190.

³³ Ibid.

information. The Union Government's attitude in this matter was governed primarily by the fact that Sir Anthony Eden had stated in public that consultation had taken place and, as you are aware, that statement was not corrected by him.³⁴

Liesching was not prepared to let the matter rest and countered with a statement reiterating that "the United Kingdom's object has always been and will remain to consult all Commonwealth countries about issues of importance affecting them". This statement then inevitably attracted attention in the South African press. Die Transvaler said that the absence of consultation was to be expected because the Commonwealth could only function on the lines of the strictest observance of the principle of non-intervention.³⁵ The Star regretted that there had been no consultation and hoped it was an isolated lapse and lectured Louw for indifference. "If Mr Louw believes that the practice may fall into disuse as far as South Africa is concerned, his duty is not to welcome it but to do everything in his power to oppose such a tendency."³⁶

At this point it is necessary to consider the reaction of extra-parliamentary parties and organs of opinion. On 1 November, a day after the British and French ultimatum, a joint statement was issued on behalf of the working committees of all the Congress Alliance organisations, which included the ANC, the SAIC, the Congress of Democrats (COD), the Federation of South African Women, and the Trade Union movement. It condemned the Israeli, British and French intervention in Suez as "a serious act of aggression against Egypt, which will have world wide

³⁴ Reported in the Cape Times of 10 November 1956 (in Eayrs, p.190).

³⁵ Quoted in Eayrs, p.191.

³⁶ Quoted in Eayrs, p.191.

repercussions".³⁷

The statement went on to note that Britain and France had used Israel as a "spearhead" to re-establish themselves as the "masters" of the Suez Canal "in order to maintain their domination over Colonial countries in Africa and the Middle East". It called upon the Afro-Asian nations and all other peoples to "stand with Egypt in preventing the violation of its sovereignty".

A letter of the same day was drawn up for circulation to all Congress Alliance provincial branches calling the invasion "an unprecedented crisis in the soil of Africa" which would have serious consequences world wide.³⁸ It called for meetings of support for Egypt to be organised "everywhere" and for religious leaders also to be contacted to "preach the message of peace and solidarity with our brothers in the North".

The COD Journal, Liberation, devoted its November editorial to the crisis and referred to the British/French/Israeli action as a "wanton, premeditated act of aggression taken in defiance of solemn undertakings and the UN Charter".³⁹ It stated that the British prime minister's excuses were "flimsy" and that "If it really was a 'police action' following the Israeli invasion, why attack Egypt?...the English and French imperialists are out for loot. They want to grab the Suez Canal." The editorial did not accept the official British view and claimed that the Israeli invasion was arranged "in advance" in order to punish Nasser for nationalising the Canal. The whole aim was to "teach the people of the colonies and former colonies of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, a lesson". It accused the British Conservative Party

³⁷ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box G (Correspondence - ANC and other organisations) No.4 (1956), Press Statement, 1 November 1956.

³⁸ Ibid., "Circular Letter to the Provinces", 1 November 1956.

³⁹ Liberation, No.22, November 1956, p.1.

government and the French government of "living in the past". The whole exercise had "misfired" as a result of American disapproval and the only support for Britain came from Australia and New Zealand. South African newspapers were criticised for a "torrent of propaganda" against Russia's invasion of Hungary which was taking place at the same time as the Suez invasion.⁴⁰

In a later editorial which was mainly directed against British colonial policy, Liberation claimed that the Suez invasion had shown the "true colours" of Britain and France, i.e. "naked force".⁴¹

Gone is the picture of benevolent Britain kindly granting independence to colonial peoples as in the opinion of Downing Street they are 'sufficiently advanced to receive it'. The whole world had realised that only violence holds the empire together.

The World's response to the Suez invasion was given in the editorial quoted earlier which claimed that Britain and France had lost prestige and had lost the support of the African people.⁴² As a moderate and usually "loyal" organ of opinion, and one that was not in the ANC political camp, the tone of aggrieved hurt used in The World's editorial was even more telling than the harsh condemnation expressed by the anti-imperialist Congress Alliance. It claimed that the issue was "one which vitally touches the heart of every African". The "common opinion" of Africans was that the Anglo-French invasion was "grossly unjust". Egypt had been given an "unjust ultimatum" concerning the Canal Users' Association and the canal "belongs to the Egyptians". Britain and France had not attacked Israel despite the ultimatum to both sides to separate. This showed "beyond any doubt" that

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.2.

⁴¹ Liberation, No.24, April 1957, pp.2-3.

⁴² The World, 17 November 1956.

Britain and France were in alliance with Israel. Britain knew that New Zealand and Australia would "always come to their side and lack the character to say no". In the minds of Africans "Russia's threat saved the Middle East situation". The war in Egypt had only served to "fan the flames of African nationalism" and Africans in Africa had been brought together by what they regarded as their "common enemy".

In January 1957 Indian Opinion commented upon Anthony Eden's resignation as British prime minister and his replacement by Harold Macmillan. This was seen as an attempt to placate the USA after Suez.⁴³ Britain's "eagerness to please" the Americans was seen as having special significance for South Africa.

If American pressure can have the effect of unseating a British Prime Minister it seems clear that American influence can be used in other directions as well. At the moment the Conservatives are messing up the relations between the White and the Non-White world. The Anglo-French invasion of Egypt and Britain's activities in the Yemen have not only offended non-White opinion in Asia and Africa but they have deepened the suspicions which the non-White world has of Western intentions.

The USA "should use her truly tremendous prestige" in endeavours to find a way out of the "stalemate" in the South African situation. She was advised to choose friends other than South Africa's "neo-Nazi friends, Britain, France and the Belgian imperialists".

In January 1957 during the no confidence debate the UP continued to lash out at the government for not taking a stand in the

⁴³ Indian Opinion, 8 January 1957.

crisis and tried to use the communist threat as a rallying point. Major P. Van der Byl, the opposition member for Greenpoint noted that whether Britain and France had acted wisely or not "was a matter of opinion" but that they had at least had the courage to stand up to "an Egyptian dictator who obviously was in close association with Russia".⁴⁴

Here was a chance for our Government to rally to a cause which was our own, for once Russia is established in the Middle East, and stands in the gateway to Africa, our very existence is in jeopardy. Whether it was due in [sic] ineptitude, sheer folly or their personal dislike of Britain, I don't know. I don't know whether it was due to anti-Semitism...All I do know is that they informed an astonished world that the Suez crisis was not their affair. In short they were neutral in a matter which vitally concerned South Africa.

He was answered by the Nationalist member for Stellenbosch, Dr J.H.O. du Plessis, who pointed out that Canada, New Zealand and Australia had been humiliated by Nasser when they offered to send troops to take part in the UN Emergency operation after the war and that "our government followed the sensible policy of keeping out of the Suez dispute" thus avoiding a similar humiliation.⁴⁵ Du Plessis also made some capital later about the attitude of the Cape Times to the whole dispute by noting that in a series of articles immediately after the crisis had arisen some strong condemnations of the British and French action had emerged in that newspaper.⁴⁶ He quoted the Cape Times as saying that Britain and France had "most of the world against them", had

⁴⁴ House of Assembly Debates, col.54, 22 January 1957.

⁴⁵ Ibid., col.60, 22 January 1957.

⁴⁶ Ibid., cols.587-589, 4 February 1957.

thrown "great strains on the alliance with the United States" and had "done about as much damage as they can do".

Du Plessis also pointed out that Dr Z. de Beer, MP for Maitland (and future leader of the Democratic Party), the son-in-law of the ex-opposition leader Strauss, had opposed the British action in a speech at a UP fete in Durban on 6 November. He had reportedly criticised the absence of consultation with Britain's Commonwealth partners and had claimed that "the effect on Commonwealth solidarity must be unfortunate".⁴⁷ The unilateral action by Britain had come as a "shock", de Beer had said, "to us who set such great store by Commonwealth solidarity".

It was only Eric Louw's ham-handed action in relation to the banning of Indian ships from using South African ports after the closure of the canal that had turned the debate over Suez briefly in favour of the UP opposition. Louw's example of "knobkerrie diplomacy"⁴⁸ had briefly rescued the opposition from what seemed to be an embarrassing "catch-22" situation. By supporting Britain they were aligning themselves against the rest of the world and most of the Commonwealth and yet they were the party that posed as the champion of the Commonwealth connection in South Africa. They risked alienating themselves even further from African and Indian opinion at home and appeared to be further to the Right than the government on issues such as decolonisation, the communist "threat" and foreign affairs in general.

Ultimately the Suez crisis can only have weakened the UP's opposition to republicanism and its resolve to maintain the Commonwealth connection. If Britain herself could show such disregard for Commonwealth sentiment what hope would there be for its embattled defenders in the southern tip of Africa? Although the UP had already shown that it distinguished clearly between the white and black Commonwealth and valued the former more than

⁴⁷ Ibid., col.589, 4 February 1957.

⁴⁸ Ibid., col.571, 4 February 1957.

the latter, only scant comfort could be derived from the fact that two members of the white Commonwealth had rallied behind Britain. The attitude of Canada was more significant and Canada had shown herself to be unambiguously condemnatory of the British action. However much Britain under her new prime minister, the debonair Harold Macmillan, might try to repair the damage, it was clear to contemporary observers in South Africa and abroad that something had gone forever from the Commonwealth ideal. Britain could no longer be described as a first-ranking world power and the looseness of the Commonwealth association had been displayed for all the world to see. As the British Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell put it in a broadcast of 8 November 1956:

What are the consequences? We have violated the Charter of the UN....A deep, deep division in the Commonwealth - only Australia and New Zealand support us. Canada and South Africa have abstained. India, Pakistan and Ceylon are all against us. This is a very grave consequence. For I believe, as do millions of others, that this Commonwealth of ours was - and could have been - the greatest force for peace and unity in the world: above all, a bridge between East and West, of incalculable value. That bridge is now almost destroyed....Only one thing can now save the reputation and honour of our country. Parliament must repudiate the Government's policy. The Prime Minister must resign.⁴⁹

Eden did resign in January of the following year. It was clear to many that he had to go for the sake of the Anglo-American alliance although it was claimed at the time that illness and overwhelming stress had made it necessary. However, the Conservatives continued in power for another eight years under Harold Macmillan who led Britain, as Round Table put it, "in a gay and elegant manner towards the acceptance of the status as

⁴⁹ Quoted in Eayrs, pp.217-218.

a second-rate power".⁵⁰

It could also be argued that after Suez a fundamental reorientation of Britain's relations with the outside world ensued. "And it was instinctively to Europe rather than the Commonwealth that [British] people turned."⁵¹ It was left to countries like India and Canada to take over from where Britain had left off. Much of the damage created by Suez was repaired by the personal initiatives of Nehru, Pearson and Diefenbaker. Nehru, especially, was prepared to work hard to prevent the break-up of the Commonwealth despite his own strong condemnation of the British invasion and despite renewed calls within India to leave the organisation.⁵²

(c) Economic themes: 1954-1958

As a post-script to the Suez crisis it is worth considering the economic connection with the Commonwealth during Strijdom's premiership because the Suez affair occasioned yet another sterling area crisis which, in turn, indirectly highlighted South Africa's importance to the smooth functioning of the system and, also, the effect of economic downturns in Britain on South Africa.

Economically, the Strijdom years were not marked by any significant break with the previous trends evidenced in the period after the war. The economy continue to expand rapidly as new gold mines were opened up and new industries were established or expanded. The balance of payments crisis of 1948-9 was not repeated although a temporary shortage of foreign exchange and investment was experienced in 1956 and again in 1958, largely as

⁵⁰ Quoted in Eayrs p.378.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.381-2.

⁵² See Nehru's statement of 7 December 1957 (quoted in Eayrs p.376) in which he claimed there was enough "breakage" in the world not to add to it by destroying the Commonwealth.

a result of economic downturns in Britain and the USA, but necessitating the introduction of exchange controls with sterling countries as well as dollar countries. The latter indicated how important the Commonwealth and British economic connection in particular still was to South Africa in the mid-50's.

It also led to accusations in parliament and outside of it that foreign confidence in South Africa was being undermined by the government's policies. For example, the Congress Alliance journal Liberation noted in an editorial of 1956 entitled "The Capitalist Crisis and South Africa" that a "coming depression in England" could affect South Africa severely and that Nationalist insistence on "apparent independence" from Britain could well lead to "wrong and unsound decisions".⁵³ Using information from the Commonwealth and Sterling Area 75th Statistical Abstract, the article claimed that, of South Africa's exports in 1954, some 34% went to Britain, 27% to the rest of the Commonwealth, 9% to the USA, 25% to Europe and 3% to other countries.⁵⁴ Imports told a similar tale of dependence on Britain and the Commonwealth with 35% coming from Britain and 17% from the rest of the Commonwealth.

What this demonstrated, claimed the article, was how dependent South Africa was on the Commonwealth economically and how especially vulnerable South Africa's exports were. It was pointed out that over 40% of South Africa's exports were primary products and over 70% of imports were manufactured goods and that in times of depression the prices of primary products usually fell faster. Furthermore, a squeeze on capital imports from Britain, ascribed to the "unfavourable reaction of investors to South Africa's future" as well as to high interest rates in Britain, was seen as "dangerous" for the South African economy as Britain was still the main source of the country's capital.

⁵³ Liberation, No.20, August 1956, pp.6-7.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

In parliament in January 1956 Eric Louw had boasted how easy it had been for South Africa to achieve a loan in the USA of some \$17m "oversubscribed in just two days" and placed in the "A" category.⁵⁵ This he said was at a time when sources of foreign capital were "generally limited" and when Britain, traditionally South Africa's main provider, was not able to provide enough for South Africa and the Commonwealth. South Africa, he said, had been able to obtain loans from the Swiss, the Dutch, the Americans and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Her financial and economic position was "with the exception of Canada's, the soundest in the Commonwealth". He denied that the government considered imposing restrictions on the repatriation of foreign capital investments as a "rumour spread by malicious persons, with the object of instilling fear".⁵⁶ Not even in times of emergency as in 1949, when the reserves fell to £58m, had the government thought of it so why should they do so now when reserves at the end of 1955 totalled £126m, he said. The unfavourable decrease in investment capital of "recent months" he ascribed to the "unfavourable position on the Stock Exchange" which was in turn the result of "British credit policy".

An editorial in the weekly Labour Party journal, Forward, debunked Louw's bravado under the words "Confidence and Credit".⁵⁷ It accused Louw of "time and again" claiming confidence in South Africa by foreign investors and of now exulting over a 9.5m pound loan while having to "pull his rank" to retain bank rates of 4.5% and to devise protective measures to prevent money leaving the country. It compared the situation with that of the Central African Federation (CAF) where loans had been offered of over £38m, "four times more than Louw's effort", and of which some £4m came from South African banks. This, claimed the editorial, indicated "a note of confidence" in the

⁵⁵ House of Assembly Debates, cols. 307-308, 25 January 1956.

⁵⁶ Ibid., col.309, 25 January 1956.

⁵⁷ Forward - The Peoples' Weekly, 2 March 1956.

CAF's future that was "lacking" in South Africa.

In June 1957 Louw wrote to Strijdom from the Commonwealth conference in London to complain that the opposition was using "scare tactics" to undermine foreign confidence and was reverting to "Smuts's tactic" of "sabotaging the economy" by negative reporting of the government's economic policies.⁵⁸ He went on to claim:

It is very clear that, as happened shortly after 1948 when Smuts began his economic sabotage campaign with the aim of frightening off foreign capital ["met die doel om die invloed van kapitaal af te skrik"], the United Party and its new leader have begun the same reckless campaign ["dieselfde roekelose kampanje voortsit"].

What was becoming increasingly evident, however, was that despite Louw's claims of economic sabotage by the opposition, a structural problem concerning South Africa's capital needs was emerging that related to the country's position as a rapidly industrialising economy and that made her particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in capital flows for political or other reasons.⁵⁹ In 1957 the Reserve Bank review of the economy by its chairman, G. De Kock, noted with concern the deficit on capital account and stated that unless productive capacity continued to

⁵⁸ TA, A2 (Strijdom Collection), Vol.3 (Official Correspondence), File 68 (Official Correspondence: Foreign Affairs, 1956 Dec.4 - 1958 Jul.7), Eric Louw - J.G. Strijdom, 21 June 1957.

⁵⁹ See Natrass and Ardington (eds), The Political Economy of South Africa, pp. 73-78 for a discussion of various views concerning South Africa's economic growth rates in the post-war period, and pp.6-23 for an periodization of the political economy of the country. Hobart Houghton's chapter entitled "Economic Development 1865 -1965" in Wilson and Thompson (eds), The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.2, South Africa 1870-1966, pp.1-32 remains a useful historical summary of the main factors influencing South Africa's economy in the modern period.

be increased by investment in new means of production at a rate commensurate with the growth in the population there would be a decline in per capita national production and standards of living.⁶⁰ De Kock had referred to the increased repayments of foreign loans and the decline in foreign investments of the previous two years and said that this underlined "the need to maintain a favourable economic climate for investment in order to attract capital".

In February 1956, notwithstanding Louw's earlier promise to the contrary, temporary exchange controls were imposed that were only lifted again a year later but which were destined to become a permanent feature of the South African economy after the political upheavals of 1960-61. For the first time such restrictions began to affect South Africa's sterling area capital movements, previous restrictions having only applied to dollar area and other "hard currency" countries. In 1958 restrictions on transactions by South African residents with sterling area countries were introduced after the gold and foreign reserves fell to £79m in May.⁶¹ Concessions allowing South Africans to retain as much as £10,000 in other sterling countries were withdrawn and applications for sterling currencies for travel purposes were now to be subject to the same restrictions as those on non-sterling countries. It was such measures that prompted angry opposition comments to the effect that the government was trying to remove South Africa from the sterling area, accusations that had been strenuously denied by Louw in 1955 in regard to the ending of the Gold Sale Agreement with Britain in that year.⁶²

Louw had predicted in 1955 that South Africa would "soon not be

⁶⁰ Quoted in Commonwealth Survey, Vol.3., No.18, "De Kock's Review of the South African Economy", 3 September 1957, pp.782-783.

⁶¹ Ibid., Vol.4, No.11, 27 May 1958, p.519.

⁶² House of Assembly Debates, col.1339, 18 February 1955.

quite so dependent on the inflow of capital from abroad" although, he added, this did not mean that such capital was "unwelcome".⁶³ New gold and uranium mines and conservative government financial policies had resulted in "a large proportion of capital expenditure being met from current expenditure", he claimed. After making similar remarks in 1958, he was criticised in parliament for implying that South Africa would be better off without what the defence minister, Erasmus, had once called "Jewish-American" foreign capital. He had aroused the suspicion that the government had a xenophobic attitude to foreign capital as a carry-over from the anti-"Hoggenheimer" attitude of the Nationalists in the 1930's.⁶⁴ More pertinent, however, was the Nationalist aim of self-sufficiency in the economic field which implied a lessening of dependence on foreign capital wherever it came from but which proved to be an elusive goal as the country's expanding industrial infrastructure necessitated ever-greater quantities of foreign investment.

South Africa's gold production continued to be important to the central reserves of the sterling area although after 1954 the agreement was terminated whereby the Union had undertaken to provide a fixed minimum quantity annually. The precarious position of the sterling area reserves in the 1950's made South Africa's gold sales crucial to the smooth functioning of the system as some British officials hastened to point out whenever the threat of deteriorating relations between the two countries loomed.⁶⁵ In the first half of 1955 the central reserves were £55m lower than in the corresponding period of 1954 and the balance of trade with the rest of the world had shifted once again into deficit. The post-war structural weakness in the sterling area reserves system made it vulnerable to sudden

⁶³ INCH, PV4 (Eric Louw Collection), File 72 (Articles and Manuscripts), "The Financial Situation of the Union of South Africa", 7 June 1955, pp.3-4.

⁶⁴ House of Assembly Debates, col.24, 22 January 1958.

⁶⁵ See, for example the memorandum quoted on p.254.

flights of capital such as occurred during the Suez crisis in November 1956.⁶⁶ The latter crisis unleashed waves of speculation against the pound which led to a fall in the reserves of \$279m for the month of November alone. Although the threat was repelled by the rapid mobilisation of British second-line reserves the structural problem continued to plague the sterling area system for years to come.⁶⁷ Essentially the problem was one of a low ratio of reserve assets to liabilities - a ratio of just 16% in 1956 compared to 56% in 1937 and one which reflected Britain's changed position from a net creditor nation to a net debtor nation after World War II. Writing in 1958, Thomas noted that the future of the sterling area system would depend on whether there was going to be a long-run tendency towards a dollar shortage.⁶⁸ The prospects, he said were "not promising" and depended upon the bargaining power of the United Kingdom and individual sterling area members in unison or individually.

South Africa's position within the sterling area system had been unique since the late 1940's, as her status as gold provider meant she no longer drew on the central reserves nor was she obliged to settle her dollar debts through the central London banking system. This had given the country considerably more latitude to diversify her international trade, an aim of some importance politically to the Nationalist government. Despite this, South Africa in 1962 still drew the largest portion of her trade from the Commonwealth and Britain in particular (a year after her departure from the Commonwealth).⁶⁹ In terms of her share of all foreign investments in South Africa Britain still held 52% in 1960 against the 19% of her nearest rival, the USA.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Brindley Thomas, "The Evolution of the Sterling Area", pp.196-7.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.199.

⁶⁹ Miller, Britain and the Old Dominions, p.228.

⁷⁰ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.51.

However, it appears that in line with a general trend towards a decline in the preference margins on intra-Commonwealth trade, the margins of Commonwealth preference on goods entering South Africa from Britain and vice versa were declining in the mid-50's.⁷¹ In terms of South African wine and fruit exports the preferences still remained important but in terms of imports from Britain, declining preference margins could only have contributed to the gradually declining share of South African trade held by Britain (a phenomenon which was mainly related to Britain's declining industrial competitiveness world-wide). In 1961 the average margin of preference on all imports from the UK into South Africa was only between 1 and 2%, compared to 17-18% for New Zealand or 10% for Australia.⁷²

⁷¹ Commonwealth Survey , Vol.6, No.18, 30 August 1960, pp.839-840.

⁷² Ibid., Vol.12, No.4, 18 February 1966, pp.252-257.

PART 4: THE GROWING STORM. VERWOERD, SHARPEVILLE
AND THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE COMMONWEALTH 1958-1961

Introduction

South Africa's last four years in the Commonwealth, before withdrawal in 1961, were marked by increasing racial violence inside the country and externally by increasing isolation and an unprecedented degree of international opprobrium. Under the leadership of H.F. Verwoerd, the ideologue of apartheid chosen to replace Strijdom in 1958, the Union moved inexorably towards the racial explosion of 1960 and the consequent political and economic uncertainties which formed the background to the withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961. Economic growth was temporarily halted by a massive flight of capital at a time when material prosperity was crucial in order to avert further unrest. It was only by the deployment of all the military and police resources of the Nationalist government that a catastrophe was averted in 1960-61 but at the result of a further abandonment of democratic principles and the rule of law. The outlawing of all the main institutions and organs of black political protest after Sharpeville in March 1960 and the arrest of thousands of opponents of the regime drew huge condemnation from abroad and initiated a new phase in South Africa's international relations - the campaign for economic sanctions sponsored by the newly-independent African and Asian countries and supported by the communist bloc.

This was the backdrop to South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961. The Union's position in the Commonwealth had become untenable by 1961, however much people like Harold Macmillan and the Australian prime minister, Robert Menzies, might have wished otherwise.¹ It is clear that only South Africa's removal from the organisation, in the absence of a

¹ Harold Macmillan's political memoirs, entitled Pointing the Way, 1957-1961 (Macmillan, London, 1972), indicate the reluctance with which he greeted the withdrawal and the lengths he went to try to avert it. Similarly, Robert Menzies in his memoirs, Afternoon Light (London, Cassell, 1967), indicates considerable impatience with the degree of interference in South Africa's internal affairs expressed at the conference and noted his forebodings at the precedent created for Australia.

complete change of heart by the country's rulers, could have saved the Commonwealth from a looming racial split and the possible resignation of some or all of the black members. Julius Nyerere's statement before the 1961 conference had made that clear² and Nehru's statement after the conference confirmed it. As Nehru put it to the Lok Sabha on 24 March 1961:

And therefore, this deadlock arose and as South Africa's government, that is, its Prime Minister, was completely unwilling to make the slightest change in the policies pursued by then in South Africa, there was no way out of the deadlock, except some kind of cleavage in the Commonwealth itself.³

The question remains, however, whether South Africa's withdrawal was inevitable and whether the traditional explanations of the roles of the various players involved in the drama of 1961 are still valid. This question is one which will receive some attention in this section and conclusions will be drawn in chapter 19 following a reassessment and re-examination of some of the more important interpretations.

J.R.T. Wood and Peter Lyon, for example, have re-interpreted the role of the Canadian premier, John Diefenbaker, traditionally regarded by white South Africa as the architect of South Africa's removal from the Commonwealth.⁴ It is wrong, says Peter Lyon, to

² In the London newspaper, The Observer, Nyerere of Tanganyika wrote on 21 March 1961 that "We cannot join any 'association of friends' which includes a State deliberately and ruthlessly pursuing a racialistic policy....We believe that the principles of the Commonwealth would be betrayed by an affirmative answer to South Africa's application for readmission as a Republic." Quoted in N. Mansergh, Documents and Speeches on Commonwealth Affairs, 1952-1962 (London, OUP, 1963), pp.370-1.

³ Quoted in Mansergh, Documents and Speeches, p.390.

⁴ Peter Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies and Attitudes to South Africa", pp.36-38 and J.R.T. Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd in the Withdrawal of South

claim that Diefenbaker played a "determinative part" in the drama of South Africa's removal from the Commonwealth. The dominant figures at the conference were Nehru, Verwoerd and perhaps Macmillan.⁵ Drawing on Basil Robinson's biography⁶, Lyon claims that Diefenbaker "temporised at first" and although the most sympathetic of the white prime ministers to the position of the non-whites, he had been constant in his search for a tolerable way of averting South Africa's withdrawal. He had been personally impressed with Verwoerd and later often remarked upon the "calm and dignity" shown by Verwoerd in the closing stages of the drama. He had also shown marked reluctance after the South African withdrawal to adopt any sort of economic measures that would have meant terminating trade or other preferences with South Africa.⁷

J.R.T. Wood comes to similar conclusions after a fresh examination of the minutes of the two prime ministers' meetings of 1960 and 1961.⁸ Drawing on these minutes and on an examination of the Welensky papers, he outlines a slightly differing view of the roles of these three which tends to debunk the key role ascribed by Verwoerd and others to South Africa's withdrawal played by Diefenbaker. In particular, he emphasizes (as did Welensky) Macmillan's role as the convenor and chairman of both conferences. It was Macmillan who, by ignoring advice by Menzies on the one hand not to include any sort of prescriptive formula on race policy for the Commonwealth, and by Diefenbaker on the other to arrange the 1961 conference in such a way that his own

Africa from the Commonwealth", Journal of Contemporary African Studies, Vol.6, No.1/2, April/October 198,7 pp.173-179.

⁵ Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies", p.37.

⁶ Here Peter Lyon quotes from H. Basil Robinson, Diefenbaker's World. A Populist in Foreign Affairs (London, University of Toronto Press, 1989), p.187.

⁷ Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies", p.38.

⁸ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", pp.153-179.

strongly anti-apartheid views could be heard last of all, was responsible for the failure to keep South Africa in. According to Welensky's memoirs, Diefenbaker's intention had been to avoid Canada giving a lead to the Afro-Asian states in their tendency to link Commonwealth membership with the need to alter South Africa's race policies.

Other authors seem to exonerate Verwoerd, partially at least, by claiming that he went to the 1961 prime ministers' conference with a sincere determination to secure South Africa's continued membership after becoming a republic. J.D.B. Miller, for example, believes that Verwoerd was sincere in his desire to keep South Africa in and acted consistently before and after the republican referendum in October 1960.⁹ Vale largely concurs with this view and lays some stress on the attempts by the British, in prior collusion with the South Africans and Australians, to prevent South Africa's withdrawal.¹⁰ Contemporary South African officials such as Piet Meiring, the head of South Africa's information service at the time and Gerhardt Jooste, the secretary of external affairs, felt Verwoerd acted fairly and honourably and laid the blame for the failure of the conference at the door of Diefenbaker and the Afro-Asians.¹¹

Historians such as Krüger¹² and Geyser¹³ concur with these views and claim Verwoerd did everything he could to avoid the possibility of a veto, even going to the extent of allowing informal discussions of his government's internal policies - something which was anathema to him and to a few other prime ministers present. According to Geyser, it was only after it had

⁹ Miller, Survey, pp.151-152.

¹⁰ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.415-417.

¹¹ See Piet Meiring, Inside Information (Cape Town, Howard Timmins, 1973), pp.163-169 and G. Jooste, Diensherinneringe, pp.294-200.

¹² Krüger, The Making of a Nation, p.334.

¹³ Geyser, Watershed for South Africa, pp.76-98.

become clear to Verwoerd that certain Commonwealth countries were determined, if not to expel South Africa, then to subject her government to continued and unacceptable interference in her internal affairs, that he decided to withdraw South Africa's application for continued membership. "National pride and self respect" demanded withdrawal, claims Geyser.¹⁴ In a similar vein, Geldenhuys claims that a potential "setback" was then turned into a "triumph" for Verwoerd when 50 000 people turned out to accord him a hero's welcome at Jan Smuts airport.¹⁵ His speech, as quoted by Geldenhuys, reaffirmed the traditional reasons which the National Party saw as being responsible for South Africa's isolation:

We have triumphed - not over another country, nor over Britain, but we have freed ourselves from the pressure of the Afro-Asian nations who were busy invading the Commonwealth. We were not prepared to allow these countries to dictate what our future should be....Therefore, we now go forward alone.¹⁶

He ruled out a return to the Commonwealth in future, with the rationale that such a return would "entail giving up the struggle of the White man to maintain himself in this country".¹⁷ As Geldenhuys notes, this theme of survival was a frequent theme of Verwoerds and was used to justify a policy of no compromise in internal and external affairs.¹⁸

However, some British officials at the time, notably the British

¹⁴ Geyser, Watershed, p.86.

¹⁵ Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.24.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.25.

high commissioner, Sir John Maud, felt that Verwoerd cared nothing for the Commonwealth. The correspondence between Maud and the CRO in mid-1960 reveals this assessment of Verwoerd's motives.¹⁹ Maud felt that Verwoerd was only concerned with attracting a high enough vote for the republic in the referendum campaign by promising he would do all he could to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth.

It will be argued here that it was the inability of Verwoerd (supported to some extent by the Australian prime minister, Menzies) to compromise, not the Afro-Asian onslaught, that drove South Africa out of the Commonwealth. The interpretations of Lyon and Wood will be supplemented and modified to some extent by one which, while placing the ultimate responsibility for the withdrawal on Verwoerd, gives a wider economic and political explanation to the events of 1960 and 1961 in the context of the British response to Verwoerd's republican campaign, and the increasing racial crisis in South Africa following the Sharpeville incident. (A secondary speculation in this section will be one which also surmises that Verwoerd was not, perhaps, as sincere as some would like to think about his desire to remain in the Commonwealth after bringing about a republic. Certainly, as the airport welcome indicated, the NP rank and file saw withdrawal as a cause for celebration and triumph, not despair. In London, as one writer has noted, Verwoerd was somewhat "cavalier" after the withdrawal and "doggedly refused to court the British Press").²⁰

It will be argued that the role of the British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, was crucial in setting the stage for South Africa's withdrawal by making it increasingly clear to the South African government throughout the period 1959 -1961 (despite some

¹⁹ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.79, Maud - Sandys (Commonwealth Secretary), 20 August 1960.

²⁰ Peter Vale, "Full Circle", South Africa's New World, Leadership International Publications, Johannesburg, 1991, pp. 6-10.

initial uncertainty) that leaving the Commonwealth would not expose South Africa to any punitive economic or diplomatic measures from their most important Commonwealth partners, Britain especially. In the crucial months after the Sharpeville incident and the 1960 prime ministers' conference, British officials and politicians gave conflicting signals to the Nationalists on the possible effects of the 1960 republican referendum on South Africa's Commonwealth relations, thus revealing a hesitancy and a degree of willingness to collude with Verwoerd that could only have encouraged him to proceed further with his constitutional programme. In the process, the anti-republican cause inside South Africa was weakened. The black extra-parliamentary opposition received further evidence of British unwillingness to interfere on their behalf in the context of a whites-only constitutional issue that contained far-reaching implications for the position of blacks in a future republic outside the Commonwealth.

It will also be seen, further, how in the aftermath of South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth the long process of "toenadering" between the English and Afrikaans voters on racial issues resulted in the final abandonment by most of the former of their traditional allegiance to "Crown and Commonwealth". The official opposition party, the UP, opposed Verwoerd's decision to withdraw - a decision which was taken by Verwoerd (and his advisers in London, including Eric Louw) without reference to cabinet or parliament.²¹ Nevertheless, Verwoerd's justification to parliament on his return earned him support from the English-speaking population who, when faced with the hard-headed argument that Verwoerd posed to them (that of losing white dominance or losing the Commonwealth), inevitably preferred the latter. As Barber and Barratt point out, it was this factor that eventually "killed the Commonwealth issue" for white English speakers, not the commitment to a republic.²² The United Party demonstrated its lack of regret by ruling out, at its 1961 conference, the

²¹ Geldenhuys, Diplomacy of Isolation, p.25.

²² Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.83.

possibility of a future return to the Club unless it were "in South Africa's interests".²³

The contemporary economic debate surrounding the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth will be mentioned as a background factor which had an important effect on the republican campaign and the circumstances surrounding withdrawal in 1961. The debate centred largely on the question as to whether South Africa would suffer financial and trading losses and whether the existing Commonwealth preferences would be withdrawn and sterling area membership terminated. This was a dispute conducted on party political lines, with the UP arguing that the worst possible consequences would follow withdrawal and the NP arguing that there would be no effect whatever on South Africa's economy because Commonwealth economic co-operation was a matter of bilateral agreements between members and was not a sine qua non of membership of the Commonwealth.²⁴

The debate was, to a certain extent, contextualised by the general background of declining intra-Commonwealth trade in proportion to world trade and by the declining value of Commonwealth preferences generally (not only in South Africa's case).²⁵ It was also contextualised by Nationalist policies of trade and foreign capital diversification, industrialisation and self-sufficiency which received impetus as capital movements became increasingly erratic during the political upheavals of the late 1950s.²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See, for example, Geyser's argument in support of Nationalist statements on this question in Watershed, pp.72-75.

²⁵ Miller, Survey, pp.444-445.

²⁶ M.M. Sejamamane and T.M. Shaw, "Continuing Crisis: Regional Coercion, Cooperation and Contradiction in Southern Africa" in Z.A. Konczacki, J.L. Parpart and T.M. Shaw (eds), Studies in the Economic History of Southern Africa, Vol. II, South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland (London, Frank Cass, 1991), pp.260-287.

Britain's attitude to the debate inside South Africa about the possible economic consequences of a republic inside or outside the Commonwealth was also of great importance. Whatever British officials may have said publicly, British interests, as much as those of South Africa, dictated that there would be a minimum disruption of the extensive trading, financial and cultural relations between the two countries. Macmillan's government negotiated with Verwoerd to ensure that South Africa would remain a Commonwealth country in fact if not in name after 1961. The white dominions followed the British lead and the precedent already created with Ireland in 1948 and allowed certain trade and other preferences to continue despite withdrawal from the Commonwealth. Unlike Ireland, however, these privileges did not last long. The international campaign against apartheid soon ensured that even the white Commonwealth countries began to adopt sporting, cultural and eventually economic sanctions against South Africa.

Developments in black politics after the ANC's final acceptance of the Freedom Charter in 1956, which postulated a non-racial and vaguely socialistic course for the organisation, had led to an increasing redefinition of strategy by the more Africanist section of opinion inside and outside the Congress Alliance.²⁷ It led to the formation of the PAC at the Orlando conference in Soweto in April 1959 and the formal allegiance of the new organisation with the doctrine of Pan-Africanism which had emerged from the All-Africa Peoples Conference in Accra in 1958.²⁸ Thus, while the anti-colonialism of the ANC continued to be expressed in the context of the non-aligned movement tinged with Marxist and socialist rhetoric, it was now vigorously challenged by the unvarnished Africanist slogan of "Africa for the Africans".

²⁷ See Hudson, "The Freedom Charter and the Theory of National Democratic Revolution", pp.8-11, Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, pp. 70-74 and Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa, pp.181-246.

²⁸ Gerhart, Black Power In South Africa, pp. 207-208.

This had implications concerning the differing attitudes shown by the two organisations to the republican issue and to the withdrawal from the Commonwealth, and these differences will be discussed in chapters 19 and 20. Nevertheless, the fact that the black population was never consulted about either the republic or the withdrawal from the Commonwealth, and that its opinion was not heeded by the mainly white-dominated press led to black opinions being strongly and pointedly expressed in the pages of the leading organs of extra-parliamentary debate. The opinions were, with the exception of those of the PAC, hostile to the decision to become a republic and to the manner in which the withdrawal from the Commonwealth took place.

In an atmosphere of unprecedented political crisis after Sharpeville, with the main extra-parliamentary parties outlawed, their leaders in prison or in exile, the republican referendum and the Commonwealth issues were not as immediate to black concerns as those of a more directly political and economic nature. However, the realisation that increasing oppression at home went hand in hand with increasing isolation from sympathetic allies in the outside world was another bitter pill for the majority of South Africans to swallow. As Indian Opinion noted in its analysis of the implications of the withdrawal, "the non-Europeans must be prepared to face a worsening future in this country...the laws of Apartheid ...will be intensified and will batten down on the black people".²⁹ With considerable bitterness it was also noted how the white Commonwealth countries led by Australia and Britain had played a role in allowing Verwoerd to "cushion the effects" of withdrawal by signing bilateral economic agreements, in a manner which was "contrary to the purpose and the spirit of the Commonwealth".³⁰

A study of the files of the British high commissioner in South Africa for the period 1958 to 1961 reveals how important for

²⁹ Indian Opinion, 24 March 1961.

³⁰ Ibid.

British policy-makers the economic and financial implications of South Africa's possible withdrawal were. It seems that much of the British response to Verwoerd's republican policy was informed by the hope that, by accommodating Verwoerd as much as possible, it would be easier to "cushion the effects" of withdrawal, if withdrawal became necessary. However, this approach resulted in something of a dilemma for Britain. If British policy makers gave the impression that nothing would really change in the relationship between Britain and South Africa after the introduction of a republic, it would undermine the anti-republican campaign of the mainly English speaking United Party opposition and would make Verwoerd's task easier.

On the other hand, it was of great importance to Britain to keep South Africa in the sterling area and to safeguard investments and trade. Verwoerd and Louw were not averse to using these factors as bargaining chips in their attempts to persuade Macmillan to be as helpful as possible concerning the republican referendum. Balancing these two policy considerations proved a difficult task for British policy-makers and led to accusations from within South Africa and from anti-apartheid forces in Britain and elsewhere that Macmillan was arranging a "sell-out" in order to satisfy financial interests.³¹

At the same time, the realisation was growing among black opinion-makers in South Africa that British conservative leadership of the Commonwealth meant the continued flouting of the sentiments of the Afro-Asians and that as such it could only lead to a further erosion of sympathy by the black majority for the Commonwealth in its then existing form.

It was perhaps timely for the future of South African black support of the Commonwealth ideal that the Tories were defeated only three years after South Africa left the Club and that a more expressly pro-African British Labour government came to power at

³¹ Indian Opinion, 3 March 1961.

a time when the Commonwealth non-racial ideal seemed to be fast fading in theory and practice.

Chapter 14: The Commonwealth and South Africa in the Late 1950s(a) The 1959 Commonwealth relations conference

An indication of the direction in which Commonwealth thinking was moving on the issue of South Africa's racial situation in the Commonwealth had already emerged at the sixth unofficial Commonwealth relations conference in Palmerston North, New Zealand in January 1959. Here delegations reflecting diverse political parties could speak openly and without the inhibitions of official conferences concerning interference in the internal affairs of member states. As at Lahore in 1954 South Africa's policies came under considerable scrutiny but not all of it was hostile. What emerged was an attitude of forthright disapproval of South Africa's racial policies but at the same time a willingness to continue talking and an acceptance that contacts through the Commonwealth medium should continue. There was as yet no talk of expulsion or of any form of sanction against South Africa other than the "force of public opinion". Cautious conservatism was still the rule when it came to questions such as interference in the internal affairs of member states, settlement of disputes and the value of personal contacts at prime ministers' meetings.

During the sessions of the conference which discussed parliamentary government, for example, it was stated that while there appeared to be unanimity about the common aspiration to democracy in the Commonwealth there were "departures" from the "democratic tradition" as in South Africa.¹ It was politely stated that: "In the case of South Africa there did not exist the homogeneous society which was a prerequisite of a full democracy embodying a uniform universal franchise". This meant that even if every Commonwealth country aspired to democracy it did not

¹ Report of the Sixth Commonwealth Unofficial Relations Conference, Palmerston North 14-21 January 1959 (S.A. Institute of International Affairs, Jan Smuts House, Johannesburg), "The Parliamentary System of Government", p.2.

ensure the unity of the Commonwealth "because one country's parliamentary democracy could be a source of offence to others". The value even of entrenched clauses was questioned because "it had proved possible to circumvent them, eg. in South Africa" and it was felt that rather than entrenched clauses a case could be made for arguing that the essential safeguard lay in peoples' attitudes towards their fellow citizens, not legislation or institutions.²

This conservative and cautious attitude towards lack of democracy within the Commonwealth was then mirrored in the discussion by delegates on the question of non-interference in each other's affairs. It was agreed that there should be the principle of non-interference but it was suggested that if the dispute between Commonwealth members had an "international character" members should offer to mediate but only at the request of both parties to the dispute.³ There was some support for the idea of using the sanction of public opinion throughout the Commonwealth for a policy which other members felt to be unwise (a polite reference again to apartheid). The conclusion was that existing personal contacts between prime ministers or high officials in conference had done much to alleviate past disputes and would continue to do so.⁴ It was this reliance on the efficacy of personal contacts at Commonwealth conferences that was to feature so strongly in the official British rationale for keeping South Africa in the organisation during the turbulent conferences of 1960 and 1961.

When the discussion moved to "multi-racial communities", however, differences of a less polite nature emerged. The opening South African speaker immediately went on the defensive, insisting that apartheid was not unfair to the Bantu people and saying that it

² Ibid., p.3.

³ Ibid., Report of Plenary Session, Monday 19 January, p.3.

⁴ Ibid., p.4.

was a "realistic policy developed over a long period".⁵ Other South African speakers pleaded for patience and urged that they should not be "hustled into taking precipitate action in this complex situation". When the question arose as to whether South Africa's racial policies might force her to withdraw from the Commonwealth, two of the South African delegates stated that although South Africa envisaged the introduction of a republic, no "responsible" government speaker had advocated secession from the Commonwealth.⁶

A speaker from Ghana argued that, as far as he was concerned, a "Bantu government for the Bantu" should be introduced "now" in South Africa.⁷ A Pakistani delegate stressed that the gravity of the charge against South Africa for its treatment of the Indian population was South Africa's refusal "to allow people of Indian origin to be integrated into the life of the nation". Individual delegates expressed their opinion that "all men must achieve equal status and equal rights irrespective of colour" throughout the Commonwealth. A British delegate stressed how bad the majority of Commonwealth delegates thought the South African case to be and referred to discrimination against the English-origin South Africans as well as the African population.⁸ The United Kingdom, he said, might not be able to abstain much longer in the UNO and elsewhere from "revealing the degree to which its people opposed the official policy in South Africa". Public opinion, he said, might force a change in British policy in this respect.

This was followed by a statement from a Canadian delegate who claimed that apartheid could not work in South Africa and that

⁵ Ibid., Report of Plenary Session on Multi-Racial Communities, p.2.

⁶ Ibid., p.3.

⁷ Ibid., p.5.

⁸ Ibid., p.9.

"territorial apartheid" was impracticable.⁹ The Canadian said that the "idealistic" side of apartheid was not being put into practice and that thus the whole policy stood open to condemnation by the West and Africans. He quoted Lord Charnwood's comment on Abraham Lincoln's attitude to the South at the time of the Civil War in the United States: "They are neither base nor senseless, but the South is wrong."¹⁰

A South African delegate, Senator J.H. Grobler, gave a pessimistic summary of the debate up to that point, saying:

We must accept that there are fundamental differences between members of the Commonwealth in this approach to racial issues. Let us consider the United Kingdom and South Africa. There is not the slightest possibility of reconciling South Africa's policy of separate development with the policy of Her Majesty's Government in Great Britain as long as the British Government insists on a policy of paramountcy of the Bantu in multi-racial African territories.¹¹

The extent to which racial issues had come to dominate Commonwealth meetings such as this unofficial conference is clear from the above statements and shows how South Africa was being forced on the defensive, even in the more congenial circumstances of an unofficial conference. The address by the New Zealand Labour prime minister, Walter Nash, to the first plenary session of the conference further stressed the point. He said:

The emphasis on racial equality is a feature

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., "Policy of Separate Development", Statement by Senator J.H. Grobler, p.5.

of the Commonwealth that I value very highly. At a time when racial hatred and oppression seem to be on the rise in the world, our association of nations stands out boldly as an example of racial partnership in practice and is almost taken for granted.¹²

However, the conference was not without its surprises. One of the African delegates from the Central African Federation, G. Lewanika, stated in the context of a discussion on multi-racial communities that he was not in a position to "blame South Africa for its racial policy".¹³ He went on to say that: "They have their own experiment and we have ours in Central Africa. If we succeed they will copy us and if we fail we shall copy them." This statement, which proved to be quite accurate as a prediction of what happened subsequently when the CAF collapsed and Southern Rhodesia went its own way under Ian Smith, indicates the extent to which cautious conservatism still dominated the thinking of many Commonwealth statesmen, even those from African countries, when it came to South Africa. A willingness to carry on talking and to avoid outright condemnation of South Africa was a feature of Commonwealth conferences right up to and including those of 1960 and 1961.

The South African delegation to the conference also included a non-Nationalist member, H.V. Roberts, who read out a paper (originally delivered to the S.A. Institute of International Affairs in November 1958), and it summed up what he saw as South Africa's deteriorating position in the Commonwealth at that point

¹² Ibid., Presidential Address to the First Plenary Session by the New Zealand Prime Minister, the Rt.Hon Walter Nash, 12 January 1959, p.5.

¹³ Ibid., Rapporteur's report on plenary session on multi-racial communities: comments by G. Lewanika, 19 January 1959, p.6.

in time.¹⁴ Roberts claimed that the re-election of the Nationalists in 1958 had "undoubtedly weakened the Commonwealth tie with South Africa" and that it represented the rise to power in South Africa of a "nation within a nation" - a nation which spoke a language foreign to other Commonwealth nations and with a culture "more from Holland" than from Britain.¹⁵ The Nationalist government, said Roberts, had no ties of sentiment to the Commonwealth: there were only ties of "expediency" such as important commercial relations which at that time still favoured the retention of the Commonwealth link. However, Strijdom and Malan had reiterated that South Africa would remain in the Commonwealth only as long as it was in her interests to remain.

Three further papers read out at the conference expressed the Indian, Australian and Canadian governments' reactions to recent developments in the Commonwealth and also indicated their attitudes to South Africa. The Australian paper¹⁶ claimed that successive Australian governments "appreciated well enough" the implications of the "transformed Commonwealth", and had accepted republicanism and the trend towards a "preponderance" of non-European members. Menzies, the Australian prime minister, had however voiced concern that ways should be devised to "prevent the Commonwealth degenerating into a loose association for temporary advantage, an association which might well lack spiritual unity and the will to pursue common ends".¹⁷ Menzies envisaged the "Two-Tier" Commonwealth with an inner core of "old members" like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, although he

¹⁴ H.V. Roberts, "The Position of South Africa in the Commonwealth" (SAIIA), November 1958.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.1.

¹⁶ "Australian Attitudes to the Commonwealth", Sixth Commonwealth Unofficial Relations Conference, Palmerston North, New Zealand, January 1959.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.5.

foresaw difficulty in accepting an "intransigent" South Africa within the core of like-minded states.

In general the paper argued that Australia was adopting a "legalistic" adherence to the non-interference clauses at UNO, as was South Africa, and this "legalistic" attitude, it was argued, "should change" in order to prevent a "loss of goodwill in Asia and India" towards Australia.¹⁸

As far as India was concerned, a paper on "The Structure and Function of the Commonwealth" noted how republicanism was not just confined to the Asian Commonwealth any more, but that: "The late Mr Strijdom's utterances suggest that it may be a near thing whether Ghana or the Union of South Africa gives the lead to the other in disowning monarchy."¹⁹ It noted how the monarchy for India no longer symbolised "subjection" but rather a "focus of association", and how the ties with Britain were declining economically and politically, especially since the Suez Crisis, which resulted in India's Commonwealth connection being "widely criticised".²⁰ Furthermore: "Racialism" in South Africa, oppression in Kenya and discrimination against Indian origin people in Ceylon "have all been referred to ...by opposition members of Parliament in India...urging severance of the Commonwealth relationship."²¹

Nehru was still, three years after Suez, experiencing difficulty in justifying the value of the Commonwealth to some groups in his parliament. While the Commonwealth Relations conference was in session in New Zealand, the Rand Daily Mail reported that Nehru

¹⁸ Ibid., p.19.

¹⁹ Karanukar Gupta, "The Structure and Function of the Commonwealth - An Indian View" (Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, n.d.), Paper presented to 6th Commonwealth Relations Conference, January 1959, p.8.

²⁰ Ibid., p.23.

²¹ Ibid., p.24.

"came to the rescue of the Commonwealth connection once again" when challenged in his own party congress about the matter.²² He reproved critics who objected to his sitting at Commonwealth conferences with South African prime ministers and said that although he strongly disapproved of apartheid, he would have nothing to do with any demand that the Commonwealth relationship should be broken over it. He restated his belief in the value of the Commonwealth relationship which, as the Rand Daily Mail approvingly noted, for all its "vagueness and flexibility", still provided the machinery for informal consultation between countries "that otherwise might be completely estranged".

A Canadian paper read at the 1959 Commonwealth Relations conference reflected how concerned Canada had become about maintaining the unity of the Commonwealth (after Suez) and keeping the developing Afro-Asian countries in. This was as much a function of Canada's desire to escape the claustrophobic presence of the American giant next door as it was a function of the newly developing "Indo-Canadian entente" in world affairs. It was noted how "in her epic struggle for the realisation of self", the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth offered an anchor which Canada could firmly grasp when the "tides of Americanism seem to pull too strongly".²³ Canada was "proud" to be associated with Australia and New Zealand and "with understandable reservations", South Africa. As far as South Africa was concerned, Diefenbaker, the prime minister, could still defend South Africa's right to remain in the Commonwealth and his foreign minister, Howard Green, could still warn as late as February 1960 that thoughts of kicking South Africa out were "foolish" because, as he put it, "nothing would remain of the Commonwealth" if such ideas were put into practice.²⁴

²² Rand Daily Mail, 15 January 1959.

²³ J.T. Saywell, "Canada and the Commonwealth", Department of History, University of Toronto (Canadian Institute of International Affairs), Paper presented at the 6th Commonwealth Relations Conference, January 1959, p.1.

²⁴ Reported in Die Vaderland, 12 February 1960.

Aside from the differing perceptions of the value of the Commonwealth connection which these three papers presented in 1959, they were similar in one respect - their less than enthusiastic attitude to South Africa. India adopted the most hostile attitude but they were all concerned not to appear too closely associated with South Africa and were all aware of the effects of "racialism" on the Commonwealth. This demonstrated the extent to which the South African "problem" was becoming a Commonwealth problem. It would soon prove to be the main focus of attention at the prime ministers conferences of the forthcoming two years.

On his return from New Zealand Senator Grobler gave an interview to the SABC which gave his impressions of the conference to his listeners.²⁵ He mentioned Godfrey Lewanika as the "Bantu MP" from the Central African Federation and described him as a "noteworthy exception to the usual contemporary Bantu intellectual" ("n merkwaardige uitsondering op die hededaagse intellektuele Bantoe"). He said that Lewanika told him he respected South Africa's attempts at apartheid but that he also expected respect for the CAF's "partnership" policy. But if partnership failed, he told Grobler, he wouldn't hesitate to "adopt apartheid". Grobler concluded his speech by saying the conference had reflected something of a "disturbing image" of South Africa to the outside world. There had also, however, been "understanding" and a desire for "reconciliation".

(b) South Africa's weakening international standing

As Vale notes, strong criticism of apartheid was being stimulated in several western countries by the end of the 1950's by domestic lobbies, and was embarrassing those governments for their

²⁵ INCH, PV 93 (Verwoerd Collection), File 1/55/2/1 (1959-61: Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences), SABC Interview : Senator Grobler's Impressions of the 6th Commonwealth Relations Conference in Palmerston North, 3 February 1959.

provision of moral support for South Africa.²⁶ Similarly, in the UNO it was being stimulated by ever-increasing difficulties for South Africa in the General Assembly. Thus, by the time South Africa was able to broach the question of a republic in the Commonwealth "its international standing was so weak already that its withdrawal was virtually a foregone conclusion".²⁷ What emerges from the attitudes expressed at the Palmerston North conference, however, is not so much a desire to expel South Africa from the Club but more of a desire to feel at liberty to direct forthright criticism at her in the hope that this would induce a change in attitude. While this may have led to a "false confidence" among the white population about South Africa's chances of remaining in the Club, there was as yet no indication of any moves to withdraw, whether from South Africa's side or from that of other countries. This was only to become a distinct possibility after Sharpeville.

The Rand Daily Mail in 1959 was probably representative of a substantial portion of opinion in South Africa when it praised Nehru for his defence of the Commonwealth and for not withdrawing from the organisation simply to satisfy his critics' indignation over apartheid.²⁸ By stressing the value of the Commonwealth for South Africa at a time when relations with the UNO had become "fragile" and when "the Downing Street link" was seen to have an increased importance, the newspaper was reflecting the hope that the Commonwealth connection would remain as a constant pillar of support in the coming years.

²⁶ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.408.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 15 January 1959.

Chapter 15: Verwoerd and the Republican Question

(a) Verwoerd's post-election policy statements

Verwoerd's victory in the electoral contest after Strijdom's death in August 1958 was achieved by the votes of a solid block of Transvaal MPs together with the nominated senators.¹ The fact that there was not unanimous support for him and that his main opponent, the Cape leader Dr T.E. Dönges, was only voted down after a second round of balloting indicates considerable doubts about the future leadership of the country from within the National Party.

According to Geldenhuys, Verwoerd differed from Strijdom in his handling of foreign policy.² His ministerial portfolio, native affairs, had been "far less insulated from foreign affairs" than Strijdom's, "given the internationalisation of South Africa's racial policies" in those years. Furthermore, says Geysler, as a former editor of Die Transvaler, a newspaper which he had "from the first edition put...in the service of the republican ideal",³ he had often commented on matters such as the British connection, republicanism and South Africa's involvement in the Second World War. He had been "firm friends" with Strijdom through their common belief in the republican ideal and he believed that if the republic were not brought in within five years after Strijdom's death it would never be.⁴ He retained Eric Louw as minister of external affairs and, as Geldenhuys notes, it was "unlikely" that Verwoerd considered replacing Louw in view of the latter's "expertise" and seniority in the party.⁵ Furthermore, Louw's "tough-minded" approach to foreign affairs "was still widely

¹ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.314.

² Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p.22.

³ Geysler, Watershed, p.48.

⁴ Ibid., p.49.

⁵ Geldenhuys, Diplomacy of Isolation, p.22.

applauded in National Party circles (although, as Geldenhuys points out, his standing in the party gradually diminished with "age, irritability, intolerance and quarrelsomeness").⁶

As far as the perceptions of the non-white majority about Verwoerd's election are concerned, the prospects, republican or otherwise, for the future seemed bleak. Albert Luthuli, president-general of the ANC, noted at the December 1958 conference of the organisation that Dr Verwoerd's accession to the premiership of the country "added to our concern but not to our surprise".⁷ The experience of Verwoerd by Africans when he was minister of native affairs made them "most apprehensive" of their future and that of the Union". Luthuli went on to describe Verwoerd as the "relentless apostle of Apartheid" determined "to keep the native in his place".

In a similar manner, the conservative Jordan Ngubane, writing in Indian Opinion, had noted with concern even before Verwoerd's election that if Verwoerd were to replace Strijdom, he would "take South Africa to a republic the hard way...even if it meant civil war".⁸

Soon after his election as prime minister Verwoerd outlined his attitude to the republican issue in a radio speech to the nation. He hoped, he said, to follow in Strijdom's footsteps and he asserted his conviction that a "toenadering" of English and Afrikaner South Africans would only occur in a republic.⁹ Apartheid would be the only solution, he said, to South Africa's race problems.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), B(a) (National Congress Meetings), No.5. (1959 Conference, Durban 13-14 December), Presidential Address, p.1.

⁸ Indian Opinion, 15 August 1958.

⁹ INCH, PV93 (Verwoerd Collection), Vol.1 (Subject files), File 1/11/2 (Verwoerd's election as Prime Minister, 1958 Sept.), Radio Speech 3 September 1958.

At a press conference a few days later he refused to be drawn on a possible date for the introduction of a republic. As to whether the republic would remain in the Commonwealth or not, Verwoerd repeated the formula agreed to in 1951 that: "This can only be decided at the time a republic is introduced and in light of world conditions. Circumstances may be entirely different in three or four years time."¹⁰

It was predicted that some time in 1960 or 1962 would be the date for a decision (on a republic) and it was expected that Verwoerd would come under pressure from his supporters to introduce "an early republic". The enfranchisement of white 18-year-olds had already "set the scene" for a republican campaign and the government believed it could count on the majority of those teenagers to support it. Verwoerd had assured the world that the republic would "maintain democratic traditions" and would continue to welcome foreign investment.

He also claimed that his policy was not to "oppress" the country's 11 million non-Europeans but to bring about racial separation "with mutual benefits...humanity and justice". There would be "no ceiling" to non-white development in "their own areas" but he was emphatically opposed to non-whites ever sitting in the central all-white parliament. As the Christian Science Monitor noted, there was something about these views that had a "theoretical and academic ring" which appeared "strangely out of tune with the realities and turbulence of existence in the African townships". Would Africa's "mounting black nationalism" wait for South Africa's future to be "mapped with the leisurely deliberation of a game of chess?"¹¹

Verwoerd elaborated on his attitude to the republic during the course of debates in parliament during September 1958 and January 1959. A republic, he said, would end the hostility between the

¹⁰ The Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 8 September 1958.

¹¹ Ibid.

white language groups, it would improve the relationship with Britain by getting rid of the suspicion of ulterior motives in choosing friendship with that country and would end the "bickering" over the "colour policy" that currently existed.¹² He refused to be drawn yet on the question as to whether the vote would be by referendum or by a general election but he stated that under certain conditions a "simple majority" of white voters would be sufficient.¹³

(b) Reactions to Verwoerd's republican statements

The official opposition under the leadership of Sir de Villiers Graaff opposed the idea of a republic, claiming that it would inevitably take place at the expense of South Africa's Commonwealth membership. He also claimed that the republican issue was based purely on "sentiment" and that it was dangerous to approach a matter "so heavily charged with emotion" on the basis of sentiment.¹⁴ What was lacking, was a debate on whether a republican form of government was any better than a monarchy and since the latter had been in existence since 1910 it needed "no justification".¹⁵ Although the prime minister had stated that the introduction of a republic was not a case of "revenge" against the English for the war of 1899-1902, Verwoerd could not deny that "all over South Africa today" racial sentiment was being "hitched to the republican wagon".¹⁶

As for the attitude of the British government, the immediate reaction was to maintain a position of careful neutrality in order to avoid accusations of influencing the republican debate inside South Africa. There was no talk from the side of British

¹² House of Assembly Debates, cols 55-60, 27 January 1959.

¹³ Ibid., col.58, 27 January 1959.

¹⁴ Ibid., col.21, 27 January 1959.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

policy-makers of insisting that the wishes of the black majority should be taken into account. Only later was this point to be used as a justification for the view that automatic support for South Africa's Commonwealth membership application could not be expected.

However, the difficulties involved in trying to maintain an appearance of neutrality when most British officials privately opposed the idea of a republic soon became clear. A "Guidance Memorandum" drawn up by the British high commission in November 1958 referred to this situation and said that since the question of the republic was "now...being so actively debated between political parties, we are in serious danger of 'interfering', or appearing to interfere, in internal politics by what we say in answer to the subject".¹⁷

The memorandum referred in particular to "certain United Party complaints" that local British representatives were saying that there would be no change in trading and economic relations between Britain and South Africa if a republic were to be introduced. These statements had "sabotaged" the UP's anti-republican campaign. This, said the memorandum, was a "very damaging and dangerous impression" for United Kingdom representatives to give and it was advised "at all costs" to "avoid giving any cause for such impressions of interference being sustained - by either Party".

Guidelines were then suggested for high commission staff and others to use in answering questions: for example, on the general political question of whether the republic would make any difference to South Africa's position in the Commonwealth, the "right" answer was to say "that membership of the Commonwealth in such circumstances would be a matter for all the members to decide and no one can possibly say now what the decision would

¹⁷ PRO, DO 119, File 1206 (The Republic and South Africa: Membership of the Commonwealth, 1958-60), No.1, Guidance Memo. by the Acting High Commissioner, R.H. Belcher, 24 November 1958.

be".¹⁸

On the question of possible economic and trading relations the memorandum noted that they would "probably" remain unchanged depending on the public confidence at the time. It would depend also on whether there were "strong nationalist economic demands" or whether there was an "authoritarian-type constitution". So the right answer was therefore to say that

if one assumes that the change will come about in circumstances which involve no shock to confidence then there will be no significant effect on general economic and trading relations but if one assumes that there will be a shock to confidence then these relations will naturally be affected.

Staff were advised not to go out of their way to say there were "grave doubts" (which would suit the UP), nor to give the impression that all would be "plain sailing" (and so please the Nationalists). This was a "South African decision" and Britain was to give "no opinion" because the consequences could "not be foreseen". It was also pointed out that this note was not concerned with the question of a republic "outside the Commonwealth" - a possibility "not being seriously canvassed at present", so there was "no objection" to staff making general statements "pointing out the advantage of the Commonwealth and its institutions". This could be done "on all suitable occasions", but even here "we should not do so in a manner which too directly suggests the Union context" - ie., the statements were to be of general, not particular reference.

Building on this advice, a note was sent by the acting high commissioner, R.H. Belcher, to Sir John Maud who was about to arrive in South Africa to take up the high commissioner's post,

¹⁸ Ibid.

giving similar advice on the trade question.¹⁹ Belcher said he did not want "to give unnecessary votes to the NP" by giving the "right answer" which was that there was "no doubt that a republic need make no difference". However, the question of membership depended on a "Commonwealth decision later" and South Africa's trade and economic relations would depend on continued Commonwealth membership (eg. "for preferences"). They would also depend on "estimates of future economic risks suggested by the circumstances surrounding the declaration of a republic and the form of the republican constitution".

Once he was installed in office in Cape Town, Maud took up the theme with the CRO in London, noting that if British representatives continued to say the republic would make no difference Britain would "lose the goodwill" of those who are traditionally her friends and "actively assist" in hastening the coming of the republic.²⁰ He said Belcher had been "right" in instructing "our people here to keep quiet or be non-committal". There was a need for a parallel warning "discreetly to be given in the United Kingdom". For ministers and officials most likely to be confronted there was no problem but other public figures "present a problem of great delicacy and the wisest thing may well be not to attempt anything in that field". He concluded:

But it must be said that the fact that public opinion in the United Kingdom is understood to have accepted the inevitability of a republic and no longer to feel any concern about it contributes just as much as statements by individual United Kingdom spokesmen to the encouragement of the republican cause.

Belcher had given Maud his personal assessment of the republican

¹⁹ DO 119, File 1206, No.2, Belcher - Maud, 22 December 1958.

²⁰ File 1206, No.4, Maud (Cape Town) - H. Lintott (C.R.O.), 26 February 1959.

movement and how Britain should react to it.²¹ Belcher believed there was "in reality, one goal" of the Nationalists and that was "to make South Africa a wholly Afrikaner-dominated state, with the English-speaking South Africans relegated to what, in fact, though no doubt, not in name, would be a position of permanent inferiority".

The Afrikaners, he said, saw the republic as a "huge victory" over the English-speaking section. This was not so much the case with the "moderates" in the party, but more with the extremist leaders of the NP, and their education system which inculcated it "in the young". Once the republic was achieved, it "might loosen the bonds uniting NP leaders to their followers" because they would no longer be united against the English. But then "other struggles" would follow, for example, the struggle for "economic supremacy".

South Africans themselves should decide on the issue, he continued, but Britain "should not welcome the republic" and, indeed, if he were right about the NP "we should deplore it" and give no encouragement. That was why the statement by R.A. Butler (home secretary under Macmillan's government) in Salisbury in October 1958 "was so damaging". Butler had said that the republic "need not" make a difference to the Union's Commonwealth relations or trading and economic relations and Eric Low consequently "rejoiced" in the statement. The UP, on the other hand, were "indignant" that their anti-republican stance was being undermined. Belcher went on to advise British representatives to use statements such as "it depends on the circumstances at the time". He personally felt that trade and economic links would "probably continue" as long as they were "profitable" but investments "may dry up" if there were signs of an "authoritarian constitution and anti-English discrimination".

The CRO took up the advice of both Belcher and Maud and drew up

²¹ File 1206, No.4, R.H. Belcher, "Statement by United Kingdom representatives on the Republican Issue", n.d.

a "Heads of Department" notice to be circulated within the CRO and other government departments in London.²² It began: "Please draw the attention of all members of your staff to the attached note about the undesirability of spokesmen for the United Kingdom government expressing views in public on the Republican issue in South Africa." The notice continued with an explanatory confidential memorandum attached saying that statements by British representatives could "give encouragement to the republican cause, since the Nationalists feel the need for some significant support for a republic from English-speaking South Africans and moreover they have doubts about the external economic and political consequences that might follow".²³

At the same time, these statements

weaken the position of the non-Nationalists, who are for the most part English-speaking and who consider that the change would produce no advantage and would involve not only the danger of an authoritarian constitution but also the risk of grave economic and political disadvantages, in particular, the loss of Commonwealth membership.

The British government could not, however, "take sides" as there was a "division along party lines" and "silence should, ideally, be the rule". But where silence was not possible the answer to questions about the republic should be that "this must depend on the circumstances at the time" and that "continued membership of the Commonwealth by a Republican South Africa would be a matter for all the Members to decide".

²² File 1206, No.5, Lintott - Maud, 20 April 1959 and No.6, E.N. Larmour (C.R.O.) - J.B. Johnstone (Cape Town), 29 April 1959.

²³ File 1206, No.8, Heads of Department Letter with attached confidential note entitled "The Union of South Africa and the Republican Issue".

British worries about how to respond to the republican campaign received fresh impetus at the beginning of the following year. In January 1960 Verwoerd made the announcement of an imminent move towards a republic to a shocked and surprised opposition and stated that a referendum would be held within a year.²⁴ It was desirable and necessary that the two issues of a republic and Commonwealth membership should be treated separately, he stated.²⁵ An ordinary majority of voters would decide, the republic would be "democratic and Christian" and the equality of the official languages would be maintained as well as the parliamentary form of government.²⁶ The state president would be a constitutional head of state and not the prime minister at the same time. He would not be elected by the electorate. This would mean he would be "above politics" and so no drastic change from the monarchical form of government would occur. The republic would maintain friendly relations with all states including Britain and the Commonwealth. If, however, a Labour Party were to come to power in Britain Verwoerd would "seriously consider" taking South Africa out of the Commonwealth.²⁷

At first he stated South West Africa would not take part in the referendum and then in March he announced that on "second thoughts", it would.²⁸ The second thoughts were more than likely a result of pressure from the National Party of South West Africa²⁹ as well as a hope that more votes for the republic would be forthcoming if the territory were to be included. Verwoerd's stated reason was that he had excluded South West Africa at first because it was "only right that this community which had suffered so much unpleasantness should be spared further unpleasantness

²⁴ Krüger, The Making of a Nation, p.322.

²⁵ Geyser, Watershed, p.51.

²⁶ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.322.

²⁷ Quoted in Mansergh, Documents and Speeches, p.361.

²⁸ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.322.

²⁹ Cape Argus, 16 March 1960.

and suspicions".³⁰ He also claimed that the United Party would protest that South West Africa was being included only because a republic could not be achieved without the territory's support. But as the UP had now pledged itself in favour of the territory joining the referendum the point fell away. The voters had also made it clear they were anxious to take part in the referendum. (In the end they voted 19938 to 12017 in favour of the republic,³¹ which may have indicated a policy miscalculation on the part of the UP).

The British high commission reacted to the announcement with some surprise. A telegram of 23 January to the CRO expressed "surprise" that Verwoerd had announced the republic "so early in the session" and after the governor-general had said there would be no contentious legislation in the first five months because of the Union celebrations.³² However, it was noted that the republic would not be authoritarian but "moderate", suggesting that extremists were "not as strong" as was thought. The Cape moderates like Dönges would support this (as Die Burger's approval of the announcement indicated) and although Natal would "fight" it, the moderate nature of the republic would help "woo" the UP and PP support. Verwoerd had realised that it was important not to "alienate financial interests".

Possible reasons why Verwoerd had announced the referendum were then postulated: that he needed popularity after public "disenchantment with the Bantustans"; to heighten nationalism before Union celebrations; the hope that British statesmen would say a republic (especially a moderate one) would mean no difference to relations; a desire not to alienate all English speakers by leaving the Commonwealth and a feeling that his position would be strengthened by speaking to other prime

³⁰ South African Digest, Vol.7, No.6, 18 March 1960, p.9.

³¹ Miller, Survey, p.151.

³² DO 119, File 1206, No.19, High Commissioner, Pretoria - Secretary of State CRO, 23 January 1960.

ministers first; this approach could "spike the guns" of the opposition who predicted South Africa would be kicked out of the Commonwealth.

It was pointed out, furthermore, that the UP had attacked the republican announcement for excluding "black voters" and for not giving convincing reasons for a republic. Others had spoken of Verwoerd breaking his vow of a "broad will of the people" in favour of a 1 vote majority.³³

Verwoerd, in his referendum announcement, had undertaken to discuss the whole matter of the republic with Macmillan during the latter's forthcoming visit to South Africa.³⁴ However, the UP opposition was not mollified and De Villiers Graaff in reply stated that his party would oppose the referendum and the republic and stated that he was convinced the introduction of a republic would take place at the expense of the Commonwealth connection.³⁵

Opposition newspapers were generally hostile to the announcement but also expressed some frustration with the way the United Party had handled it in parliament. The Rand Daily Mail, for example, published an article by the journalist Laurence Gandar which criticised the UP for missing the opportunity to choose its own ground on the issue of how the republic would be brought about.³⁶ The UP, Gandar wrote, should never have accepted the principle of a simple majority vote for bringing about such an important constitutional change. It would be a precedent for other future constitutional changes. It should have also insisted that there be only "nominal changes from the present system" and that South Africa should remain a member of the Commonwealth. He argued for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Geyser, Watershed, p.52.

³⁵ Ibid., p.52.

³⁶ Rand Daily Mail, 29 January 1960.

a more "positive form of anti-republicanism" to avoid the spectacle of English-speakers being dragged "kicking and clawing" into the republican age. He also pointed out that Verwoerd had at least pre-empted the "extremists" in his own party who wanted the republic to be outside the Commonwealth and to be a return to a "Kruger-type republic".

From the point of view of the extra-parliamentary majority, however, the prospects for South Africa as a republic, whether in or out of the Commonwealth, aroused only the deepest gloom. A press statement by the ANC on 23 January 1960 responded to Verwoerd's announcement of an impending republican referendum with suspicion and foreboding. It noted that "Consistent with the practice and policies of the Nationalists", the Europeans alone would decide by simple majority whether South Africa would become a republic - the non-Europeans being wholly excluded from these "far-reaching changes".³⁷ The statement noted the "shrewdness" of the Nationalists in making this announcement a few days before the British prime minister's visit and on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Union celebrations:

Europeans will be united in welcoming Mr Macmillan, a large number of them will also be united in celebrating the 50th anniversary and this would be a favourable atmosphere for a republic. The Nationalists have attempted to conceal their real purpose of establishing a republic by giving an impression that they want a democratic Parliamentary form of republic. These tactics can only deceive Europeans whose concept of democracy has been warped by racialism.

However, the ANC had "no illusions" about the fact that the Nationalists intended to establish a "fascist republic" which their leaders had been "advocating for years". It was opposed to

³⁷ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box.E (Press Statements), No.21 "Announcement on a Republic", 23 January 1960.

both "the form and the method" of bringing about the republic and would fight "uncompromisingly" for a form of government "in which everybody, irrespective of colour or creed will have the right to participate". It warned the people of South Africa not to be deceived by the "mild language in which Dr Verwoerd's announcement had been couched", noting that this was merely a tactic "to win over the English speaking section of our people". It concluded by saying that the fact that the government had "completely ignored Non-European opinion" on so important an issue further demonstrated the "utter contempt with which the opinion of the majority is regarded by the Nationalists".

On 6 February 1960, under the heading, "Voteless Africans Speak their Mind on the S.A. Republic," The conservative Johannesburg newspaper, The World, said the reason why the Nationalists wanted a republic was to unify whites and "to make the Englishman more of an Afrikaner" because of the "Black Menace".³⁸ The Africans' view of the republic was that it was "sinister and undesirable" and that it would "seal the doom of the African and further entrench white domination". It "conjured up the old Boer Republics with their unholy dictum of 'no equality between white and black' in church and state". The Africans feared that the "worst excesses of apartheid would be given free rein under a republican form of government". The aspirations of Africans in South Africa were similar to those in the high commission territories, namely "evolutionary attainment of independence under the British Crown". They viewed "any suggestion to develop along lines incompatible with the British monarchical form of government with the greatest suspicion and mistrust".

The reaction of the Pan-Africanist Congress under its national secretary, Potlako Leballo, was much more dismissive of the whole affair. "Our view is that the African people have never been a party to the Union of South Africa, for, at its formation they

³⁸ The World, 6 February 1960.

were not consulted", he said.³⁹ The constitution of the Union was "not of our choice" so the republican question was "purely white politics". The aim of the republic was to entrench white domination and to perpetuate "herrenvolk policies". The PAC programme of national liberation remained to be fulfilled: "Republic or no republic we are concerned with a massive drive towards a free, independent democratic United States of Africa".

Indian Opinion commented in the context of the fiftieth anniversary of Union in June 1960: "Not much note has been taken of the fact that simultaneously with the consummation of fifty years of Union the old liberal tradition of the South died completely and fully".⁴⁰ The "North" was now completely in the saddle, as had been shown by the abolition of African representation in parliament and the death of the Cape Liberal tradition.

It is now for the Non-European people no more a question of Union. It is simply a matter of the domination of the country by the narrow Afrikaner Nationalist creed of the North. A new era now opens in this country - an era that is on all fours with the rise of the Mussolini and Hitler regimes.

In September 1960 the Congress of Democrats newsletter, Counter Attack, urged whites to vote against the republic in the referendum, even though it "was not a matter of life and death to South Africa".⁴¹ At the same time the referendum would be exposed as "meaningless" without the participation of the majority and the white population would be made aware of this by putting before them "the real alternative to the present social order - a fully democratic multi-racial order".

³⁹ Quoted in The World, 6 February 1960.

⁴⁰ Indian Opinion, 3 June 1960.

⁴¹ AD 2186, Box H (Publications), b (Periodicals), No.8, Counter Attack, 7 September 1960.

By then, however, events such as Macmillan's visit to South Africa, his "Winds of Change" speech and the Sharpeville incident in March of that year had changed the climate of opinion among whites in South Africa to the point where what little liberal sentiment remained was being further subordinated to the dictates of white racial solidarity.

Chapter 16: Macmillan's Visit to South Africa(a) The "Winds of Change" speech

In November 1959, before the referendum announcement, Verwoerd had made it known that he intended to ask the British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, to visit South Africa on the last leg of his African tour scheduled for January and February of 1960. Among other things, Verwoerd intended to broach the subject of a republic and Commonwealth membership during the visit.¹

According to Geldenhuys, this was to be Verwoerd's first great "test" in terms of his own brand of personal diplomacy.² Macmillan's visit was to afford him his first opportunity for direct talks with a "distinguished counterpart" and for measuring his "political convictions" and "diplomatic skills" against those of a foreign leader. It also proved to be a severe test of nerves and patience for Macmillan, as the British prime minister recalled in his memoirs.³

For Britain the 1960's promised to be a decade of turbulence in the Commonwealth and Empire. It had already opened with an unprecedented onslaught in the UNO against colonialism and imperialism, sponsored largely by the Soviet Union. Macmillan was highly conscious of the need to retain the newly-independent states of Africa in the western sphere of influence and thus of the crucial importance of his 1960 visit to the continent. Ghana and Nigeria had indicated their desire to join the Commonwealth and Macmillan was determined to ensure a smooth entry for them to the "Club" despite increasing evidence in the case of Ghana of internal dissensions and signs of political oppression. He was

¹ INCH, PV93 (Verwoerd Collection), File 1/42/1/1 1951-1960 (Protectorates-General), Editorial in South Africa Magazine (London), entitled "Dr Verwoerd at the Summit", 28 November, 1959.

² Geldenhuys, Diplomacy of Isolation, p.23.

³ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.150-161.

also hoping to smooth the way for a visit of the queen to Ghana later in the year, a visit which, as it turned out, was almost cancelled as a result of the dangerous political situation in that country.

It was, however, the white-ruled south that was to occasion the most anxiety for Macmillan during his African tour.⁴ The second-last leg, before his arrival in the Union, was spent in the increasingly unstable Central African Federation where Macmillan encountered considerable hostility from a section of white opinion suspicious of a possible British "sell-out". The appointment of a commission of inquiry into the political affairs of the Federation (the Monckton commission) had become necessary as a result of the growing feeling among the black population that only a break-up of the territory into its constituent parts would provide a way out of the strangle-hold on political power maintained by the white settlers of Southern Rhodesia. For Macmillan, caught between the "Scylla" of the powerful right-wing bloc in his own party (over which the Federation prime minister, Roy Welensky, seemed to have considerable influence) and the "Charybdis" of African opinion, the Federation proved to be his main source of worry in Africa and seemed to occasion him an undue amount of time and effort at a period when the superpower tensions of the Cold War were at their height.⁵ At times the South African problem seemed, in comparison, to be a "welcome distraction" from these worries.⁶

The CRO had been preparing briefs for Macmillan's visit to the Union since November of the previous year and these briefings, based largely on the advice given by the British high commissioner in South Africa, Sir John Maud, indicated

⁴ See Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.131-161.

⁵ Alistair Horne, Macmillan 1957-1986. The Official Biography, Vol.2 (London, Macmillan, 1989), pp.191-193, 200-202, 205-211.

⁶ Ibid., p.204.

Macmillan's line of strategy to be adopted in his talks with Verwoerd. A briefing of 4 December suggested that Verwoerd would try to tell Macmillan a republic was essential for unity in South Africa and would ask for Macmillan's co-operation in bringing it about.⁷ It stated that Verwoerd would be "greatly encouraged" if the prime minister gave the assurance that the republic would make no difference to British/South African relations but that "passionate anti-republicans" among the English speakers would regard such a statement as a "sell-out to the Nationalists".

In handling this question we cannot ignore the large body of English-speaking South Africans whose sentiment for the monarchy is strong and who genuinely fear that Dr Verwoerd intends to set up an authoritarian republic outside the Commonwealth.

It was noted that English-speakers were moving towards a position of "resigned acquiescence" and that the government would probably get a numerical majority in the referendum, but not in Natal. "Non-Europeans would, of course, not be consulted".

This latter point, however, did not seem to be the main factor against the republic in the eyes of British officialdom. Throughout this period of intense policy debate on the republic and Commonwealth membership it was clear that the British government was most concerned with the opinions of the white electorate in South Africa, not of the voteless black majority. The wording of memoranda and telegrams makes it clear that when phrases such as "the majority of South Africans" were used, British officials were referring to "white" South Africans only. This approach meant tacit acceptance of the rules of the game devised by Verwoerd for the referendum and it meant that any sort of direct appeal by Britain to the loyalties of the black majority was out of the question.

⁷ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.10, Brief on forthcoming visit of Prime Minister to South Africa in February 1960, from High Commissioner's office, Pretoria, 4 December 1959.

The briefing of 4 December was very much a reflection of this type of thinking. It suggested that Macmillan should, firstly, assure Verwoerd that only the "people of South Africa" (by which was meant "white people") could decide on a republic, and, secondly, that it was impossible to forecast the effects of such a change on British/South African relations; that this would depend on the circumstances and that it would probably only be accepted by Britain if the "great majority of the population" supported it. Then "other Commonwealth precedents would apply and unimpaired relations would follow". But if it were brought about in circumstances of "bitter controversy" without a clear expression of "national will" it would be "unrealistic" to think this might not have repercussions on sentiment in the United Kingdom towards South Africa.

Macmillan should express the hope that South Africa would wish to stay in the Commonwealth, and that "this would certainly be an important factor influencing British reaction to the change". The briefing seemed to be quite sanguine about South Africa's prospects of remaining in the Commonwealth. (This was still some time before Sharpeville). If Verwoerd were to raise the procedural question, Macmillan would have to say there was an agreed procedure of (1) first informing fellow prime ministers of the intention and (2) that others would have to signify agreement. Macmillan could add that the Indian, Pakistani and Ghanaian precedents "created an expectation that Members would accord the same treatment...to South Africa". As far as Britain was concerned, "we would not want to exclude any country from Commonwealth membership because of a change in its constitution".

It was also surmised that Verwoerd was interested in the Irish option of "external association" with the Commonwealth in a manner which would give South Africa some of the "benefits" but none of the "obligations" of membership and without recognising the queen as head of the Commonwealth. This was to be "discouraged", as Eire (and Cyprus) were "special cases" which

for reasons of geography or affiliation had been granted external association and the same could not be said of South Africa.

Macmillan would "be pressed" by Verwoerd to issue some sort of agreed communique at the end of the talks and here "special care" was needed when referring to the republic. The communique should aim to say that the republican question was a domestic issue (thus avoiding giving the "sell-out impression"). Verwoerd should be persuaded to agree to say that he wanted South Africa to remain in the Commonwealth, although it was "not likely" he would want to be committed on this. The communique should also say that it was for all members of the Commonwealth to decide whether South Africa remained a member and that Britain would not want to exclude any member because of a change to its constitution.

In the meantime the British high commission in Ghana informed South Africa and other Commonwealth high commissions that Nkrumah had sent personal letters to all prime ministers including Verwoerd announcing his intention of introducing a republic before the May conference.⁸ It was then suggested by the British high commission in Cape Town that an addition to Macmillan's briefing be made pointing out that, in the light of Ghana's application, Verwoerd "might be tempted to ask permission" for South Africa at the same time.⁹ It would "be difficult" for the assembled prime ministers to disagree if both requests were presented.

On the other hand it was unlikely that the republican referendum in South Africa would have been held by that time and so it was surmised that Verwoerd might not want to alienate the anti-republican opposition even more by making a premature application in May. Nevertheless, it was possible that he would try to make

⁸ File 1206, No.16, High Commission (Ghana) to CRO and all High Commissions, 25 December 1959.

⁹ File 1206, No.17, H.C's office, Pretoria - Secretary of State, CRO., 30 December 1959.

South African approval for Ghana's application contingent on approval for South Africa's later. It could "be pointed out" that "other South Africans in the past", including C.R. Swart, had "put themselves on record against any such advance commitments".

While the British prime minister was being briefed on his forthcoming meeting with Verwoerd both the ANC and the SA Indian Congress sent letters to him asking him to make his stand against South Africa's apartheid policy clear and to meet their leaders while he was in South Africa.¹⁰ Soon after Macmillan had arrived in the Union, Duma Nokwe, the secretary-general of the ANC, wrote to him to say:

We regret that you, Sir, as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom have visited our country at the invitation of the Nationalist Government because we are convinced that the Nationalists will attempt to use your visit to quell the mounting world-wide condemnation of their racialistic and oppressive policies. It would indeed be most unfortunate and regrettable if the Nationalist Party should be given an opportunity to claim that their policies have the sympathies of the head of the Government of the United Kingdom. Already the fact that the British delegation at the United Nations Organisation supported the tenuous contention of the Nationalist Government that its racialistic policy and ruthless oppression of the Non-European people is a domestic issue had aroused serious doubts about the attitude of the British Government towards racialism.¹¹

The letter went on to describe the "Chamber of Horrors" which South Africa had become for Africans under apartheid and ended

¹⁰ AD 2186, (ANC), Box E, No.23, Press Statement by SAIC (by Dr G.M. Naicker, President) and the ANC (by Duma Nokwe, Secretary-General) on Mr MacMillan's visit to Africa.

¹¹ Ibid., Nokwe - MacMillan, 25 January 1960.

with a request to Macmillan to meet the leaders of the ANC at a "time and place which would be most convenient" to him.

With expressions of regret Macmillan declined this request saying that "arrangements" had not enabled him to receive any deputations from organisations "not represented in Parliament".¹² This was in fact a polite way of saying that the Nationalists frowned upon the idea of him visiting such organisations and that he did not want to strain the patience of his hosts too much. In Pointing the Way Macmillan said that although the South African government had refused to allow him to see leaders of the ANC he had been able to meet "individuals" such as Margaret Ballinger, Dr Joost de Blank, Archbishop of Cape Town and the Liberal Party leader, Patrick Duncan.¹³

In a private note, Verwoerd's reaction to the criticism of his refusal to allow Macmillan to visit extra-parliamentary leaders was peevish. He asked how Macmillan would have reacted if visiting politicians to Britain asked to speak to leaders of political groups outside parliament, "even those looked down upon", like Moseley (the fascist leader) and his junior.¹⁴

By now fully briefed for his talks with Verwoerd and expressing some anxiety and foreboding, Macmillan arrived in Cape Town on 2 February. Preliminary talks began almost immediately between Eric Louw and Verwoerd on the one side, Macmillan, Maud and Sir Norman Brook, the cabinet secretary, on the other.¹⁵ The talks continued the day after the formal delivery of Macmillan's "Winds of Change" speech on 3 February. It was during these conferences,

¹² AD 2186, E, 24, MacMillan- Nokwe, February 1960.

¹³ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.151.

¹⁴ INCH, PV 93 (Verwoerd Collection), File 1/55/2/2 (1960-61: the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences), Memo: "Meeting With ANC, Liberal or other Extra-Parliamentary Leaders", by H.F. Verwoerd, n.d.

¹⁵ Macmillan. Pointing the Way, pp.152-155.

Macmillan wrote, that he began to realise to the full extent "the degree of obstinacy, amounting really to fanaticism, which Dr Verwoerd brought to the consideration of his policies".¹⁶ On only one point, said Macmillan, was there some gain for Britain: the question of the high commission territories had been raised and Verwoerd made it clear he would not pursue the matter of transfer for the present.¹⁷ (However, in the talks with Verwoerd and Louw on 4 February, the high commission territories had been brought up again and then it seemed to Macmillan that both South Africans had been "affronted" by the constitutional changes which Britain was introducing "without prior consultation" with the Union in those territories. Macmillan, however, "refused to do more than take note" of these protests).¹⁸

On the question of a republic, Macmillan found that Verwoerd tried to extract some "impression or view" from him that he could use to his advantage during the referendum campaign.

I refused to lend myself to this and said nothing to suggest that public opinion in the United Kingdom was indifferent as to whether the monarchical system would be abandoned. Indeed it was clear from my reception, especially in Cape Town and Durban, that there was a strong minority determined to do everything possible to remain both under the Throne and within the Commonwealth.¹⁹

As for the position of the queen as head of the Commonwealth, Macmillan found Verwoerd's attitude "not merely illiberal but definitely shabby".²⁰ Verwoerd had said there was still "strong

¹⁶ Ibid., p.152.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.153.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.160.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p.154.

feeling" in South Africa against recognising the queen as head of the Commonwealth and Macmillan replied he was "amazed" at this. Was it not "ungenerous" to the forty-five percent of the population who were of British descent to deny the queen as head of the Commonwealth, he asked. Would it not contradict the reconciliation policy Verwoerd himself espoused? Verwoerd "hummed and ha'ed" at this saying there was still great feeling against the monarchy in South Africa and that it would help future relations if this could be removed.²¹

Verwoerd had then brought up the subject of Ireland and Macmillan told him it was "not relevant". De Valera had accepted the British monarch as head of the Commonwealth and Ireland had later left the Commonwealth "for different reasons".²² Verwoerd talked about Cyprus and Macmillan had to tell him he thought Cyprus was another matter. The question there was whether a country "whose policy was more or less under the protection of two foreign powers" could be regarded as fully independent and qualified for Commonwealth membership. Verwoerd "acquiesced in this" and said no more, but expressed his pleasure in getting Macmillan's views "frankly".

On 4 February Macmillan reconsidered the question of what he said about procedural questions relating to the Union's remaining in the Commonwealth as a republic.²³ In a note to Verwoerd he said he wanted to put in writing what he had said on that morning regarding procedural questions. He now stated that the precedent of other countries was that they could remain in the Commonwealth after becoming republics and that since the question was likely to arise within "the next two years" it would be in accord with precedence if it were raised as a hypothetical question in May.

²¹ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.24B, Extract from a provisional note of a discussion between the Prime Minister and Dr Verwoerd at Groote Schuur, Cape Town, 4 February, 1960.

²² Ibid.

²³ File 1206, No.25, Note handed to Verwoerd by D.W.S. Hunt, Groote Schuur, Cape Town, 5 February 1960.

Macmillan now felt it was better to raise it verbally in May than leaving it to correspondence later. He hoped Verwoerd would attend the May meeting and that the membership question would be an added reason for him to attend. It was also important because it was a "pre-Summit" meeting (USA, USSR and UK) and because Ghana's continued membership of the Commonwealth would be discussed as well as that of Nigeria.

Moreover, as I told you, I would feel it would be a great advantage if at such a meeting you and I and say, Menzies and Diefenbaker and Nash could have informal talks together about all these problems. I am sure we could all gain.

In conclusion, Macmillan asked Verwoerd to regard the letter as private and confidential as it would cause "great inconvenience if known directly or indirectly".

The "Winds of Change" speech" had been delivered on 3 February, in between the private conferences with Louw and Verwoerd. There is no indication in Macmillan's memoirs nor in the official summary of the talks whether the speech, which came as a shock to Verwoerd by all accounts, affected the talks to any extent or changed Verwoerd's views about retaining Commonwealth membership at those talks. One could surmise, however, that the deep resentment he felt at the way Macmillan handled the speech²⁴ hardened Verwoerd's determination to achieve his primary aim of establishing the self-sufficient "white" republic, with or without Britain's support. D.W. Krüger, refers to Macmillan's speech as an "explosion"²⁵ and a "surprise" because, "contrary to custom", Macmillan omitted to divulge its contents to his hosts. Piet Meiring, the head of the department of information,

²⁴ Wood, The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd, p.155. (Here he refers to Fred Barnard, Verwoerd's private secretary, who wrote Thirteen Years with Dr H.F. Verwoerd, Voortrekkerpers, Johannesburg, 1967, p.62).

²⁵ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.323.

noted that nobody was prepared for anything but complimentary platitudes from Macmillan in his speech to the two houses of parliament.²⁶

Macmillan recalled that the address to both houses of parliament had caused him some "trepidation" beforehand and he had prepared his speech carefully.²⁷ He acknowledged that it had caused some "surprise" and "shock" to Verwoerd although he claimed to have given the latter "some indication" of what he was going to say.²⁸

The shock had not been confined to Verwoerd only. As Die Burger said in commentary on Macmillan's speech:

South Africa has been formally served notice in the British Prime Minister's speech of a state of emergency in our relations with the West and our situation in Africa. And let us have no illusions, this British policy is also the general western attitude.²⁹

Round Table's comments on the Macmillan speech were:

There has never been a speech to which so much attention has been paid in South Africa. The sudden demonstration that South Africa was so far out of step that even friendly Britain was forced to disown us, in the polite but unmistakable terms used by Mr Macmillan, came as a shock.³⁰

²⁶ Piet Meiring, Inside Information, p.160.

²⁷ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.155.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Quoted in the South African Digest, Vol.7, No.4, 19 February 1960, p.5.

³⁰ "South Africa in Turmoil. From Boycott to Assassination", Round Table, Vol.51, December 1960 - December 1961, p.245.

Krüger notes that Macmillan began by condemning the anti-South African boycott movement in Britain. This was applauded by the assembled parliamentarians, but when he went on to discuss race politics he was listened to in "cold but polite silence". He informed his audience of his most striking impression of his recent African tour, that is the strength of growing "African national consciousness" and then delivered his much-quoted phrase which gave the speech its famous description:

The wind of change is blowing throughout the continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must accept it as a fact. Our national policies must take account of it.³¹

He went on to compare African nationalism with Afrikaner nationalism in terms of what one contemporary admirer, the journalist and writer, Anthony Sampson, claimed to be "a wide sweep of history ..and with superb deftness".³²

The words "Winds of Change" were, according to Macmillan's biographer, Alistair Horne, derived from the speech of a previous conservative prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, in 1934: "There is a wind of nationalism and freedom blowing around the world".³³ Macmillan had, as he went on, softened the impact of these words, however, dwelling meaningfully on the words "nationalism" and "nation" to appeal to his audience's pride in creating a new nation, the first of the African nationalisms.

Macmillan went on to claim that although it was a basic principle of the Commonwealth to respect each other's sovereignty as nations, in the "shrinking world of today" the effects of one nation's policies were felt in nations outside it. Britain was

³¹ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.323.

³² Quoted in Horne, Macmillan, p.195.

³³ Horne, Macmillan, p.195.

committed to equal opportunity and shared political power in her dependencies. Macmillan felt, frankly, that British people were unable to support some aspects of South Africa's policies without being false to their own deep convictions about the destinies of free men.

Verwoerd's off-the-cuff reply, described by Krüger as "brief and courteous", thanked Macmillan for his frankness but stated plainly a difference of opinion.³⁴ Verwoerd claimed that what South Africa was doing was in full accord with what was happening in Africa. Although South Africa would never presume to criticise what Britain was doing in Africa, South Africans frankly differed with Britain. The whites also needed justice and had nowhere else to go. White South Africa was a nation in its own right in Africa. The blacks would have a full but separate future.

(b) Local and international reactions

Krüger claims that South Africans received the news of the speech "calmly" and that there was "nothing... new" in it besides the veiled threat that Britain might oppose South Africa when necessary.³⁵ It was, however, the jubilant response of the "liberal press" overseas that caused an angry reaction in South Africa and "indirectly ...added to the estrangement between South Africa and Britain". Macmillan himself wrote that the local press reaction was "much less hostile than I expected" and it was only when the news of its reception in Britain and else where came through that "criticism combined with a good deal of self-pity and resentment began to develop".³⁶

The reaction of many whites to the speech could be summarised in the words of Douglas Mitchell, the United Party MP for South Coast, Natal. "This one thing is certain", he said, "Britain is

³⁴ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.324.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.159.

getting out of Africa...[but]...The white people are here to stay".³⁷ These words were later repudiated by the MP for Salt River, Harry Lawrence, who claimed that Britain was facing her responsibilities bravely in Africa and that Britain could not be expected to "wash her hands of" her responsibilities in areas such as the high commission territories because she was concerned to win over "the hearts and minds" of the blacks.³⁸

Dr Jan Steytler, chairman of the new Progressive Party, declared his party's support for Macmillan in parliament by denying Mitchell's inference that Britain was getting out of Africa. Instead, said Steytler, Macmillan had made suggestions which "in his opinion and in the opinion of the Western world, could constitute the basis on which we who live in South Africa ...can live in peace and co-operation with hope for the future."³⁹

It was to be expected that the reaction to Macmillan's speech inside South Africa would fasten upon those passages in which Macmillan had stressed Britain's policies of race partnership, self-government and rejection of racial superiority.⁴⁰ As Miller points out, Macmillan's words on South Africa's race policies "effectively disengaged Britain from public support for South Africa" which meant in effect that South Africa could no longer count on British support at UNO "and it raised doubt whether Britain might withdraw support in other spheres too. Miller claims it induced "something of a note of uncertainty" in South Africa and gave Macmillan some room for manoeuvre in his future negotiations with other Commonwealth countries in Africa. He rejects the views of those like Lord Kilmuir, the lord chancellor in Britain, who claimed that the speech directly caused South Africa's secession from the Commonwealth and encouraged other

³⁷ Quoted in Geyser, Watershed, pp.63-64.

³⁸ Cape Times, 19 February 1960.

³⁹ House of Assembly Debates, Col.3129, 10 March 1960.

⁴⁰ Miller, Survey, p.140.

Commonwealth nations to pose as champions of human rights.⁴¹

Gerhardt Jooste, the secretary of South Africa's external affairs department lamented that Macmillan's speech had had such wide publicity overseas while the spontaneous reply of Verwoerd had been largely ignored.⁴² He also felt that the fact that Macmillan had criticized South Africa publicly in her own parliament made the "impact" of the speech ("trefkrag") even greater and gave encouragement to South Africa's opponents to make unprecedented attacks on her at Commonwealth conferences.

The white press was largely divided on ethnic lines in its reaction with leading English newspapers giving Macmillan guarded praise while Afrikaner papers rejected him. Indian Opinion gave what could be regarded as the most cogent indication of non-European reactions by praising Macmillan for his support of African nationalism but criticising him for not taking harsher measures against South Africa.

On 4 February, The Star under the gloomy headline "South Africa's Isolation", noted how a statesman "whose voice commands the attention of millions throughout the world"⁴³ had warned whites of the "dangers" of ignoring the "surge of nationalism" sweeping over the continent and of the need to come to terms with African aspirations on the basis of "justice and human dignity". Britain had "disagreed radically" with South Africa's racial policies and might no longer support her. The speech illuminated "with painful clarity" the "spiritual isolation" into which South Africa had fallen. Verwoerd's initial reaction "did nothing to dissipate the impression of a nation apart and out of step" with western civilisation. The introduction of a republic would reinforce this isolation by "cutting us off from the Commonwealth".

⁴¹ Ibid., n.1, p.141.

⁴² Jooste, Diensherinneringe, p.190.

⁴³ The Star, 4 February 1960.

Die Burger, on 15 February, praised the Natal leader of the UP, Douglas Mitchell, for speaking plainly ("reguit") about Macmillan's speech and for "raising the flag of the white nation" in response to Macmillan.⁴⁴ It praised Mitchell also for understanding that "outside pressure would unite the whites". This was "not enough", however, because the UP was busy carrying out a "civil war" against the Nationalists over the republican question. The monarchy had become a "divisive factor" for the white nation that it could "ill afford" at that time.

The Cape Times published an article by Anthony Delius on 16 February which argued that Britain was not quitting Africa and that blacks were not waving Britain goodbye when they turned out in vast numbers to say farewell to Macmillan.⁴⁵ Instead they were there to "celebrate a new relationship with her". Thus it was better to heed Macmillan's advice that any attempt by whites to "to maintain their presence in Africa by political dominance, police force or barricade, had no future for them or for the West". Rather develop a racial "partnership" unblinded by racial hostility, argued Delius.

Professor A.C. Cilliers, writing in the Cape Argus, saw it all very differently, however.⁴⁶ As an Afrikaner academic, nationalistically inclined but passionately wedded to the idea of English-Afrikaner reconciliation, he saw Macmillan's speech as the

signal for an ideological invasion and onslaught on South Africa and her internal racial policies by practically the whole socialistically inclined, or ill-informed and uncomprehending outside world which it will need all our fortitude and all our unified strength to withstand.

⁴⁴ Die Burger, 15 February 1960.

⁴⁵ Cape Times, 16 February 1960.

⁴⁶ Cape Argus, 11 February 1960.

Even before Macmillan's visit Indian Opinion had been speculating about the possible political effects and reactions. Jordan Ngubane's column noted on 11 December 1959⁴⁷ that Macmillan's forthcoming visit aroused the "suspicion" among Africans that it was intended to "boost up apartheid" and to be a "pat on the back" for Britain's support of South Africa in the UNO.

On 19 February 1960, reporting on the aftermath of the Macmillan visit, Indian Opinion expressed the comments of Dr G. Naicker, president of the SAIC, at a meeting in Durban:

We naturally were all anxious to hear what political message the British Prime Minister had for all South Africans. His speech must have a tonic effect for all political groups in South Africa. In the last few years the Afro-Asian Powers have made their influence keenly felt in international affairs and it is indeed heart-warming that Macmillan recognises this trend and the important role it was to play in the future of world history. Only one aspect of the Prime Minister's speech jarred as far as we are concerned. He did not meet Congress leaders in South Africa to know and understand their point of view and the Congress struggle for full democratic rights in South Africa.⁴⁸

Naicker also felt it was "unjustified" of Macmillan to criticise the economic boycott movement in Britain because if he was aware of the "plight of the non-white peoples" he would realise it was a "weapon ...in support of the struggle for freedom".⁴⁹ It was the Labour Party in Britain which supported the boycott and the SAIC was not "unmindful" of this. Macmillan would have thought

⁴⁷ Indian Opinion, 11 December 1959.

⁴⁸ Indian Opinion, 19 February 1960.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

twice about speaking about the boycott in parliament if he had met members of the Congress alliance. If he was "sincere" about his opposition to apartheid he would support the Afro-Asians at UNO against racialism, Naicker concluded.

A press summary of the overseas reactions to Macmillan's visit issued by the South African Information Service⁵⁰ shows the extent to which foreign commentary was in general favourable to Macmillan and hostile to the South African government. This was especially so in the United States where the New York Times of 4 February captioned its front page report with the heading "Macmillan in South Africa censures Apartheid Policy".⁵¹ The New York Herald Tribune described Macmillan's speech as both "polite and courageous", courageous especially because "South Africa is looking for an excuse to leave the Commonwealth".⁵²

The conservative Canadian paper, The Toronto Globe and Mail, however, claimed Macmillan had broken the rules by criticising a Commonwealth member's internal policies.⁵³ It reported how the Canadian prime minister, Diefenbaker, had rejected a Canadian Labour congress demand for the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth only a week before and had defended South Africa's right to deal with her internal problems as she saw fit. The newspaper went on to suggest that Macmillan's words "might well push" Verwoerd into holding a plebiscite to determine if South African voters favour a withdrawal from the Commonwealth.

When it came to white opinions in settler colonies like Rhodesia and Kenya the reaction was cautiously welcoming of Macmillan's

⁵⁰ INCH, PV 93 (Verwoerd Collection), File 1/9/3/5 (Foreign Affairs, Britain, 1959-60) S.A. Information Service, Summary of Press Comments on Macmillan's Tour, in the USA, Canada, Switzerland, Rhodesia, Kenya, Australia, Portugal and the UK, n.d.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p.5.

speech. In Rhodesia, the Bulawayo Chronicle said that critics of Macmillan would be "annoyed" by his expressions of friendship towards South Africa - "as though these things were a crime,"⁵⁴ while the Northern News claimed the Commonwealth could "clearly" not criticise South Africa's desire to become a republic while so many other of its members were accorded that status and expressed "satisfaction" that Macmillan had no wish to sever ties with South Africa. Leading Australian and New Zealand papers were described as favourable to Macmillan and gave prominence to the African demonstration on his arrival in Johannesburg and to his reception in the protectorates.⁵⁵

British newspapers were divided in their attitude with the Daily Express leading the conservative viewpoint: "After hearing him [Macmillan], South Africans will realise that the ridiculous proposal for the boycott of their goods is not representative of British action."⁵⁶ The Daily Herald, on the other hand, claimed Verwoerd was "desperate" for someone like Macmillan to come out in support of apartheid, and if he were to condemn it he would earn the support of millions of Africans.⁵⁷ The Times, Telegraph, Mirror and other leading dailies adopted cautiously approving viewpoints in favour of their prime minister and his warnings to South Africa.⁵⁸

Miller claims that Macmillan's statements had to be seen in the context of Verwoerd's previous announcements in parliament (20 January) about the republican referendum. In particular, he says, Macmillan "did not want to bind himself to accept in advance" Verwoerd's views on a Labour party government coming to power and its effects on South Africa's Commonwealth membership. (Verwoerd

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.11.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.12.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.18.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.18-20.

had threatened in January that if a Labour government came to power he would consider taking South Africa out of the Commonwealth. If Macmillan had been seen to acquiesce in this by mollifying Verwoerd he would have been sharply criticised at home). At the same time he did not want to accept Verwoerd's views on membership "being dependent on how other members treated South Africa". So, in other words, the "Winds of Change" speech represented Macmillan's refusal to "acquiesce in all that South Africa might do".⁵⁹

But at best it could be argued that this was only a qualified refusal to acquiesce because, as Macmillan's actions later indicated, Britain appeared more concerned about the danger of losing her close relationship with South Africa than with the danger of alienating the African majority. On his return to Britain Macmillan adopted a much more conciliatory attitude to South Africa in a speech in which he reported back on his African tour. He said that 1960 was a jubilee year for South Africa and that the Union of 1910, had been an act of "unparalleled generosity".⁶⁰ He said that good faith in self-government for South Africa then had been seen as "far-sighted" and had "drowned out voices to the contrary". He went on to say that whites in South Africa and Rhodesia should have a sense of security about their continued stay in Africa and that "the rights of minorities should be guaranteed".

In reference to his Cape Town speech he said he had made it clear the differences between the policies of the British and South Africans concerning race partnership and that "South Africa was wrong". But he had also pointed out the areas of co-operation in the Commonwealth and the world between South Africa and Britain. He stressed that it was impossible in the modern world to "send any country to Coventry" and his efforts to thaw relations with

⁵⁹ Miller, Survey, p.140.

⁶⁰ Journal of the Royal Commonwealth Society, "The Prime Minister on Africa", Vol. 3., No.3, May-June 1960, p.77.

the USSR illustrated this. The British Empire was different to that of the Roman or Ottoman in that it "encourages independence", he said. This had been the lesson of the American revolution.

What was being said here summed up the basics of Macmillan's approach to the South African "problem". He was demonstrating a determination to push ahead with decolonisation in Africa but was at the same time willing to continue talking to South Africa and treating South Africa for all intents and purposes as a valuable Commonwealth ally and trading partner. His thoughts on the merits of Union in 1910 did change somewhat in the aftermath of the Sharpeville incident (and by the time he wrote his memoirs)⁶¹ but in Pointing the Way Macmillan made clear that he had been determined to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth and he stated his belief that "the pressure not merely of public opinion in the world but the actual necessities of living alongside their African neighbours, would lead to a gradual change in the philosophy which lay behind this rigid Calvinism".⁶²

This "gradualist" approach, or what later came to be called by the Americans, "Constructive Engagement", informed the whole British approach to the South African situation and was adopted to varying degrees by both Labour and Conservative governments before and after Macmillan. Underlying it were the entirely practical imperatives of trade, economics and cultural connections that we have already seen to be the main factors in the British-South African relationship since 1945.

⁶¹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.292.

⁶² Ibid., p.293.

Chapter 17: Sharpeville, the Commonwealth Reaction and the 1960 Commonwealth Conference

(a) Sharpeville intrudes on the republican debate

Before the events surrounding Sharpeville and the attempted assassination of the South African prime minister (9 April 1960) there had been speculation in the press that Verwoerd would not go to the May Commonwealth conference out of spite or anger at Macmillan's "Winds of Change" speech. Verwoerd countered these allegations in parliament on the day of the Sharpeville shootings and followed with a major statement of policy towards the Commonwealth and the forthcoming conference:

I want to say quite clearly that although I know that the British Prime Minister and I hold different views in certain matters, I am at the same time also aware of the fact that there are many points in connection with which we and our respective countries can and will help one another. My attitude towards him personally is of the most friendly nature, a fact which I hope was clearly demonstrated while he was here in South Africa.¹

He went on to reject the "lie" that whatever his attitude towards attending the conference was, that it was motivated by a "grudge" against Macmillan. He considered the prime ministers' conferences to be very important occasions and that South Africa would ensure she was represented there if the prime minister was unable to go. He had stated previously that it would be difficult for himself to attend but he would ensure the country was represented.² He did not feel it was necessary for the prime minister to attend every meeting and other countries had similar feelings. However, he wished to announce that in respect of the forthcoming

¹ House of Assembly Debates, col.3775, 21 March 1960.

² Ibid., col.3776, 21 March 1960.

conference, he did intend to attend "because I am convinced it is in the best interests of South Africa".³ (For this statement there were cheers from both sides of the House). He intended also to bring along with him the minister of external affairs, Eric Louw, for which statement an opposition member interjected: "That is a mistake".⁴

Verwoerd then went on to answer a previous question about his attitude to Commonwealth membership put to him by De Villiers Graaff:

In certain matters membership of the Commonwealth is of no assistance to us at the present time and in other matters it is valuable to us. Membership of the Commonwealth, when viewed soberly, is not based on any sentimental reason. There are some members and some people in this country who like this Commonwealth connection for sentimental reasons. Hon. members would not believe me if I said that for sentimental reasons I recognize the value of the Commonwealth connection at this stage....On the other hand I hope they will believe in my honesty when I say that we believe that on sober common-sense grounds the Commonwealth is of value to us to-day....I believe that in connection with our colour problems the Commonwealth is of no value to us.⁵

Dealing with De Villiers Graaff's intimation that other Commonwealth countries may not wish to continue South Africa's membership if it became a republic Verwoerd countered that while it was true that it depended on the other members to say, yes, South Africa would not be the first to object to any other

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., col.3777, 21 March 1960.

⁵ Ibid.

member's application.⁶ He referred here to Ghana's impending application to join as a republic and stated

For example, it is possible for us, seeing that Ghana, as we know, is going to apply for membership of the Commonwealth, to oppose it at the Conference of Prime Ministers. We can do so, but we shall not do so. We will support Ghana's application.⁷

South Africa had supported India's application as well and thus how could the opposition could say that other members should "want to kick us out?" This, he claimed, was opposition "propaganda" against the republic and would not succeed in delaying the republic. He then defended himself against a previous opposition accusation that he was anti-monarchist on personal grounds because of his stance during the Royal Tour of 1947 when as editor of Die Transvaler he had refused to report the tour's progress. This was not out of a personal grudge but rather because of the "political propaganda" which the UP had then tried to make out of the king's visit and which was counter to the convention that the monarchy should be kept out of party politics.⁸

He ended his speech with an appeal to the opposition to accept the republic as a means of unifying the country on economic grounds and for the sake of ending "differences" on the colour problem.⁹

De Villiers Graaff in reply said he was "delighted" that both Verwoerd and Louw were going to the conference and that the latter could only benefit from the personal contacts with other

⁶ Ibid., col.3779, 21 March 1960.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., col.3781, 21 March 1960.

⁹ Ibid., col.3783, 21 March 1960.

Commonwealth leaders.¹⁰ "I feel that much good can flow to South Africa as a result of that decision". He also thanked Verwoerd for "reacting so speedily to the events in Vanderbijlpark and other areas ...in respect of protests by a certain section of the Bantu people apparently concerning passes".¹¹

After this display of "toenadering" and congratulation De Villiers Graaff went on to discuss the prime minister's conference. He asked Verwoerd to try to ascertain what the attitude of the other countries would be to South Africa's republican application as Ceylon, Ghana and Pakistan had done. That would "destroy the danger of any misunderstanding" concerning the alleged misrepresentation of the Commonwealth attitude before the referendum. Rejecting Verwoerd's view that the Commonwealth had not helped South Africa with the colour problem, he said

I believe very firmly that it is because we are members of the Commonwealth... that there have not been far greater difficulties in respect of that matter than there are at the present time.¹²

Finally, in reply to Verwoerd's statement that the republic could unify South Africa more than ever before, he stated that the opposite could occur "as what had happened in Ireland, India and Ceylon". By denying the registered coloured voters their right to vote on the issue they were avoiding a "fairer trial of strength". He concluded, "they [the NP] may be laying up a ground for division which will take a very long time to live down in the future".¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., col.3784, 21 March 1960.

¹² Ibid., col.3787, 21 March 1960.

¹³ Ibid., col.3788, 21 March 1960.

Verwoerd's measured tones and De Villiers Graaff's warnings for the future were soon drowned out by mounting world-wide anger at South Africa's racial policies and in particular at the Sharpeville shootings, the worst of the series of confrontations between police and demonstrators called out by the PAC to defy the Pass Laws. The response to the PAC call had been patchy but the police at Sharpeville had acted in a particularly violent manner by firing into a crowd surrounding the police station. 67 Africans were killed and 186 wounded.¹⁴ The memory of Sharpeville remains above those of other police shootings before and after because, as Barber and Barratt put it, "it was seen as part of the broader struggle which was sweeping Africans into power across the continent" and one which the PAC leader, Robert Sobukwe, had promised would result in "freedom and independence" for South Africa by 1963.¹⁵

It had occurred at the most inopportune time as far as South Africa's Commonwealth prospects were concerned. Macmillan dwelt at length in his memoirs on the effects of Sharpeville on Commonwealth relations in general and on South Africa in particular. He pointed out how Britain had been forced to abstain in the UNO Security Council resolution condemning South Africa. It was, he said, a necessary action to prevent the Commonwealth from disintegrating.¹⁶ If Britain had supported South Africa on this issue and had voted against the resolution the consequences may well have been a disintegration of the Commonwealth, with enraged African opinion demanding the pull-out of African countries from the club.

Alistair Horne's biography of Macmillan further describes the effect of Sharpeville on British policy towards South Africa and on Macmillan's own efforts to keep South Africa in the

¹⁴ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.69.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.70.

¹⁶ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.155-169.

Commonwealth.¹⁷ Noting that the British press had "gone to town" over the "tragic incident" of 21 March with "all sorts of dreadful pictures, etc.", Macmillan now foresaw there would be "a tremendous effort to stoke up similar riots in Rhodesia or Nyasaland or Kenya, in order to put the United Kingdom in the dock".¹⁸ Britain had taken the "not very noble but very sensible course", of abstaining on the UN resolution condemning South Africa.

What is clear from British cabinet records is how very much concerned Macmillan's government seemed to be at that time to avoid offending South Africa over the UN Security Council vote. This emerges from the cabinet discussion of 29 March on the vote. The whole tenor of the argument was how to avoid an "extreme" resolution from the Afro-Asians which would possibly call for sanctions against South Africa and which would be a "precedent" for action against other colonial powers including Britain. It was advised that Macmillan should send a message to Verwoerd explaining to him that Britain would not support inscription on the Security Council agenda of South Africa's race policies but would also not oppose it because of the danger of offending Ghana and Nigeria. The message would explain the "reason for these tactics"¹⁹ It was hoped that the general line of debate in the council would be "to avoid inflaming the situation or isolating the South African government since that would not be in the interests of the inhabitants of South Africa". An independent investigation of Sharpeville by the UN would be "unacceptable" to South Africa and would be a "most undesirable precedent for disturbances in Colonial territories".

On 1 April Macmillan's cabinet discussed the Ecuadorean resolution condemning South Africa. It was seen as "unacceptable" to Britain in terms of clause 2(7) (non-interference) and because

¹⁷ Horne, Macmillan, pp.202-204

¹⁸ Quoted in Horne, Macmillan, p.203.

¹⁹ PRO, CAB128/34, C.C.(60)21,3, 29 March 1960.

it declared South Africa's situation a threat to world peace. But, as the foreign minister, Selwyn Lloyd, pointed out to the cabinet it could not be vetoed by Britain because there would most likely be a demand for a special session of the General Assembly, something that would "exacerbate the situation still more".²⁰ It would also antagonise the "other Commonwealth countries, particularly Ghana and Nigeria". He thus advised abstention. The Commonwealth secretary, Lord Home (Alec Douglas-Home), agreed with Lloyd and suggested that "we could explain to South Africa that it was not in their best interests" if Britain voted against the resolution and if discussion in UNO was thereby prolonged.

Sir David Eccles, the education minister, was the only cabinet minister to advise voting for the resolution. He argued that "the inevitable development of nationalist forces in Africa and elsewhere...[made it]..not possible in future to rely on 2(7) as protection for circumstances such as in South Africa recently". Britain should, he said, try to persuade the South African government to "adjust" its internal policies. The general feeling of the cabinet was, however, against interfering in the policies of an independent Commonwealth country and that therefore abstention was the best course. It would, said Macmillan, seem to be "the course least likely to lead to an immediate crisis in Commonwealth affairs". The "forthcoming" Commonwealth conference would provide the best opportunity for bringing the opinion of the rest of the Commonwealth to bear on South Africa, although, he said, her racial policies would not be discussed there.

Sharpeville had been widely reported in Commonwealth newspapers and had been strongly debated in various Commonwealth parliaments. Nehru had displayed some hesitancy when it was debated in the Indian parliament on 23 March, saying that "Normally ...this is not a matter which this House should

²⁰ PRO, CAB128/34, C.C.(60)22, 3, 1 April 1960.

discuss, I mean some internal matter within the internal jurisdiction of some other country".²¹ What had happened, however, had "shocked the conscience of the world" and so "normal rules and procedures" were no longer adequate. Three days later he allowed a formal resolution of condemnation of South Africa to be passed, and he extended the idea of abnormality to take account of "deep-seated and powerful" expressions of feeling.²²

Tunku Abdul Rahman of the Malaysian Federation, who was about to attend his country's first Commonwealth conference, initiated a more "shrill" debate on Sharpeville in his parliament on 26 April, and expressed his "abhorrence" at the violence used in pursuit of the apartheid policy.²³ He still, however, made a distinction between criticising the policy of apartheid which was, he said, "purely a domestic and internal affair of South Africa" and the "atrocities" which had resulted from the policy and which had to be condemned.

Menzies of Australia, on the other hand, put the emphasis on caution about interfering with another country's internal affairs when Sharpeville was debated in his parliament on 29 March. "We do have our own Native population and we do have ...our own responsibilities in respect of Papua and New Guinea", he pointed out.²⁴ Menzies, who had been for many years a strong believer in the non-interference principle, was not prepared to allow anything stronger than a resolution of sympathy to be passed by the Australian parliament despite opposition Labour Party calls for further condemnation of South Africa. Menzies also urged Macmillan later to use the British veto in Security Council to prevent discussion of Sharpeville and he reminded South Africa's critics that the Commonwealth was "composed of countries not

²¹ Quoted in Miller, Survey, p.143.

²² Ibid., p.144.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p.145.

governments". His approach was that expulsion of South Africa would merely punish the South African white opposition as well as the millions of voteless blacks.²⁵

Canada's parliament debated Sharpeville on 27 April with the opposition calling for the government to dissociate itself from South Africa. Diefenbaker's response was to warn against public disapproval of South Africa and to point out that there would be opportunities at the Commonwealth conference for informal discussions.²⁶

On 8 April a Labour opposition motion was adopted in the House of Commons, and accepted by the Macmillan government. It noted:

That this House, deploring the present racialistic policies now being pursued by the South African Government ...urges Her Majesty's Government to take the opportunity at the forthcoming Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference to bring home to the South African Government the strong feelings of British people on the question.²⁷

The minister of state for Commonwealth relations, Alport, trying to deflect much of the motion's impact, responded that there would be such an opportunity during the informal sessions at the Commonwealth conference and that therefore the motion already partly reflected existing Commonwealth procedures.²⁸ He also pointed out the need for circumspection concerning interference in other Commonwealth government policies because this could be seen as an attempt to reassert the old dominance of the United Kingdom in the Commonwealth. The "antidote" to the South African "tragedy", he continued, was for Britain to help lead South

²⁵ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.156.

²⁶ Miller, Survey, p.145.

²⁷ Commonwealth Survey, Vol.6, No.9, 26 April 1960, p.381.

²⁸ Ibid.

Africa out of the "cul de sac of history from which there could be no escape except through violence and tragedy".

According to Miller, the most "striking" of the Commonwealth parliamentary debates on Sharpeville was this House of Commons debate in London on 8 April. The Labour opposition motion deploring South Africa's racial policies was adopted without a division and, as Miller remarks: "It was remarkable that a Conservative government should have permitted such a resolution to be adopted about the government of a country with which Britain had such close ties."²⁹ It suggested, says Miller, that Macmillan endorsed two significant aspects of the motion; namely, that repression following from apartheid was threatening the welfare and security of all races in South Africa (i.e. that a "bloodbath" could result) and, secondly, that the situation threatened good relations between members of the Commonwealth. In other words, Macmillan's mind was beginning to run along the lines that it would not be worth breaking up the Commonwealth "merely because a minority government in South Africa insisted upon a racial policy which hardly anybody outside the Union was prepared to defend".³⁰

When the first Labour motion criticising South Africa immediately after Sharpeville came to the cabinet's attention the discussion indicated a rather different view of the British government's feeling than that illustrated above. It appears that Macmillan's cabinet was then far more worried than about the effect of discussing South Africa's internal affairs on British relations with the Union than about showing sympathy and outrage over the shootings at Sharpeville. Macmillan said on 24 March that the government should "avoid lending public support to the view that the recent disturbances in South Africa were the inevitable result of the racial policies of the Union Government".³¹

²⁹ Miller, Survey, p.146.

³⁰ Ibid., p.146.

³¹ PRO, CAB128/34, C.C.(60)20,2, 24 March 1960.

Although he admitted that government supporters would find it "difficult" to vote against the Labour motion (which had been described by Macmillan as having been drawn up in terms "carefully chosen" and unlikely to be ruled out of order by the Speaker) it was necessary, he said, to place an amendment which expressed "sympathy" and "regret" but which also reaffirmed that it was not Commonwealth policy to "pass judgment" on the internal policies of member states.

In South Africa's parliament the external affairs vote in April was dominated by the implications of Sharpeville on South Africa's international relations. The worsening diplomatic situation highlighted by the British parliamentary motion of censure the previous week was outlined by the opposition: "We have had the British prime minister forced by public opinion in his own country to try to persuade our people at the Commonwealth Conference to amend our policies".³²

Louw's reply to the opposition simply denied that government policies had anything to do with South Africa's isolation but instead put the blame on "reports that have been sent from this country to the Press abroad".³³ He then announced that Verwoerd would not be going to the Commonwealth conference as a result of his injuries but that Louw himself had been instructed to represent South Africa instead (to which Harry Lawrence remarked: "That is disastrous").³⁴ Louw then proceeded to avoid the question of why Britain and France had not vetoed the Security Council resolution against South Africa but harped instead on the question of "unjustified intervention" in South Africa's affairs by UNO and other countries.³⁵

³² House of Assembly Debates, col.5512, 19 April 1960.

³³ Ibid., col.5557, 19 April 1960.

³⁴ Ibid., col.5558, 19 April 1960.

³⁵ Ibid., col.5563, 19 April 1960.

On 19 April, the high commission wrote to London with an update on the latest political developments since the announcement of a state of emergency.³⁶ It was claimed that the referendum could be postponed "as a result of preoccupations with the domestic front". The UP had opposed the first reading of the Referendum bill on 11 March on the grounds of the exclusion of the coloured vote and Dr Steytler of the Progressives had also opposed it on the grounds of the exclusion of qualified blacks. Both opposition leaders were opposed to the proposed wording of the ballot paper which was "Yes" to a republic and "No" if in favour of the monarchy. It would give a "psychological advantage" to the republicans. Verwoerd was "unlikely to attend" the May conference and thus it was unlikely the republic would be raised. It may also be "more difficult" to get the agreement of the other prime ministers since the state of emergency, "but circumstances may change", it was surmised.

On 23 April the high commissioner reported that Louw had been asked in the Assembly whether South Africa had yet sought the views of other Commonwealth prime ministers as Ghana had. Louw's reply was that the Referendum bill was not yet passed and that so far the government had only indicated its intent of a republic and its desire to test opinion but had nothing more to add.³⁷ On the same day the bill was unexpectedly brought to the top of the list of government business and a guillotine of 25 hours placed on the second reading debate for remaining stages of the debate.

In Britain, meanwhile, public outrage against South Africa was mounting. The anti-Conservative government Daily Herald called for a "national demonstration" against Verwoerd if he attended the Commonwealth conference in May and that this should take the form of a "two-minutes' silence throughout the country in

³⁶ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.40, E.J. Emery - R.G. Britten, CRO, 19 April, 1960.

³⁷ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.41, High Commissioner's office - CRO, 23 April 1960.

mourning for the men and women butchered by Verwoerd's police".³⁸ It also condemned Macmillan's government and the conservative Times newspaper for "refusing to judge in advance of the evidence" that "Seventy African men and women were massacred".

On the eve of the conference an article in Indian Opinion written by India's former ambassador to China, Egypt and France, K.M. Panikkar, called for the Commonwealth to adopt a "joint declaration of principle" about racial policies "in order to show South Africa's leaders that they stand alone".³⁹ It was noted that no sanctions were at the Commonwealth's disposal, including expulsion, as so many people were calling for in South Africa's case and that only such a declaration against racism was left as a weapon. It would "raise the moral stature" of the Commonwealth. "Silence...would have the reverse effect".

A few days before the conference began Eric Louw denied reports that he intended to walk out if South Africa's internal affairs were discussed. However, he admitted that things would be "far more difficult" than at previous conferences and that the "recent" British parliamentary motion against South Africa had not made his position any easier.⁴⁰

On 29 April the British Labour Party independent weekly journal, Tribune, argued the pros and cons of expelling South Africa from the Commonwealth and noted that Commonwealth pressure had not succeeded "in pulling the Nationalists one millimetre off their course towards apartheid".⁴¹ Expulsion, it argued, "might be a decisive factor in toppling Verwoerd from power". It also suggested that expulsion would so affect the country economically

³⁸ Reported in Indian Opinion, 1 April 1960.

³⁹ Indian Opinion, 27 May 1960.

⁴⁰ The Star, 28 April 1960.

⁴¹ INCH, PV 4 (Eric Louw Collection), File 184 (Newspaper clippings 1960-63, 7 April- 1 May 1960), No.54, Tribune, 29 April 1960.

and militarily that it would make her more vulnerable to outside pressures and help the "sane South Africans to get rid of the hateful regime". However, this should only be considered after consultation by the Labour Party policy makers with "those African leaders who can still be consulted and those Europeans like Trevor Huddleston and Ronald Segal, with first-hand experience of South Africa".

Diefenbaker, meanwhile, was reported to have said just before he left Canada for the conference in London, that while he was against racial discrimination, he would not "follow the popular course ...and denounce Canada's Commonwealth partner for its apartheid policy". He would instead approach the issue rather with "moderation and restraint".⁴²

Statements in the Times of London by some Commonwealth prime ministers before the conference began indicated that most did not support bringing up South Africa's policies officially but rather in private discussion as had been arranged beforehand. Ayub Khan of Pakistan stated: "There is a need for wisdom so that racial animosity does not spread any more, but whether it will do any good to discuss it at the conference I am not an expert to comment on that point."⁴³ The representative for Ceylon, deputising in the absence of his prime minister, revealed a certain naive optimism by stating that he favoured setting up some sort of "central Commonwealth court to try matters relating to the Commonwealth".⁴⁴

The Observer predicted that South Africa would not be "put in the dock by most Commonwealth leaders and that Macmillan was already sounding out their views in order to prevent a "row". The Tunku of Malaysia, however, was the "rebel" who was already committed

⁴² PV 4, File 184, No.55, Daily Gleaner, (Frederickton, Canada), 29 April 1960.

⁴³ PV 4, File 184, No.57, Times, 30 April 1960.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

by a resolution of his parliament to bringing up the apartheid issue.⁴⁵

(b) The 1960 Commonwealth conference

On 4 February, the day after the "Winds of Change" speech, Macmillan and Verwoerd had met to discuss South Africa's republican referendum and the chances of remaining in the Commonwealth thereafter.⁴⁶ As Geysler points out, Macmillan had told Verwoerd that he could expect British support to keep South Africa in⁴⁷ and that he was convinced that Diefenbaker, Menzies and the New Zealand prime minister would support him. He had been uncertain, however, about Nkrumah although "Nehru would put him in his place".⁴⁸ Geysler claims that events were to prove how "wrong" Macmillan was in his expectations of Diefenbaker and Nehru.

It could be argued, however, that both before and during the 1960 conference, there was no real evidence of a hard-line approach by either of these statesmen to South Africa and that it was only the intransigence of Eric Louw, South Africa's representative at the conference, that drove them and others to demand that South Africa's policies be discussed. As Macmillan pointed out later, none of the prime ministers had committed himself to a position on South Africa's future membership of the Commonwealth, either before or after the May 1960 conference.⁴⁹

By mid-March it was still uncertain, however, whether Verwoerd would be attending the May conference in person and whether he

⁴⁵ The Observer, 1 May 1960.

⁴⁶ See above pp.356-357.

⁴⁷ Geysler, Watershed, p.64.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.65.

⁴⁹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.285-286.

would be raising the republican question.⁵⁰ The first indication for British officials that he intended raising the matter came on 22 March when Verwoerd asked De Villiers Graaff in parliament to support a republic if South Africa could get assurances of continued Commonwealth membership at the May conference.⁵¹

Verwoerd had written just before the conference to Macmillan outlining his desire to stay in the Commonwealth but had threatened to "blackball" Cyprus's application if there was to be any hint of South Africa's application being "blackballed".⁵² According to Macmillan the rules of procedure concerning republican membership were not an issue and should not have been a problem for any country applying for membership after becoming a republic. Menzies of Australia had also promised all his help in persuading the others of South Africa's desire to stay in the Commonwealth.⁵³

In the interim all the events surrounding the Sharpeville massacre and attempted assassination of Verwoerd had taken place and on 19 April it was announced that Eric Louw would go to the conference in Verwoerd's place. Geysler describes the choice of Louw as "unfortunate".⁵⁴ Macmillan had no liking for him and had on one occasion (in a personal interview with Geysler in the 1980's) referred to Louw as an "evil genius". The Commonwealth secretary, Douglas-Home, was also of the view that Louw was not the right person to handle such a delicate issue as the continued membership of the Commonwealth.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.33A, Home - Maud, 3 March 1960.

⁵¹ File 1206, No.39, E.J. Emery (High Commission, Cape Town) - J. Chadwick (CRO), 24 March 1960.

⁵² Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.289.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Geysler, Watershed, p.67.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

During April the British cabinet was being prepared for the conference and for the issue of South Africa in particular, in briefings drawn up by the CRO. These briefings dealt with questions such as the implications of South Africa's becoming a republic on trading relations with Britain, the question of South Africa's likely attempts to get British support for a republic and the position of the queen as head of the Commonwealth. The briefing of 18 April, while advising that there should be no commitment by Britain on membership prior to the referendum, and that Verwoerd would try to obtain such a commitment, also advised circumspection concerning the mentioning of Britain's immediate interests in the republican campaign.⁵⁶

What was of unusual interest was the remark that Macmillan would "probably not want to refer to Britain's interest in English South Africans during the talks or our suspicion that the voteless majority may favour remaining in the Commonwealth". He would also be reluctant to mention "our interest in remaining in as close relations as may be with the country that can so easily dominate the high commission territories"; nor "the effect that the declaration of a republic would have on Section 151 of the South Africa Act of 1909 which made permissive provision for transfer to the Union".

A second brief of 29 April referred to the question of the queen as head of the Commonwealth and suggested in its "Talking Points" that if the matter were to be raised by South Africa, Macmillan should point out there would be a "sharply hostile" public reaction if South Africa tried to get the benefits of association with the Commonwealth without recognition of the queen. It would mean "ignoring the wishes of half the white population".⁵⁷

⁵⁶ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.46, Secret: PMM (UK) (60), 18 April 1960. Cabinet: Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting 1960. "South Africa: Declaration of a Republic", Brief by the Commonwealth Relations Office.

⁵⁷ No.47, PMM (UK) (60) 29 April 1960. Brief by the CRO.

The events of the conference (3-13 May 1960) have been extensively covered by authors such as Miller, Geyser, Horne and Wood as well as in the memoirs of statesmen such as Macmillan and Menzies. Drawing on the Welensky papers and the official minutes of the conference, J.R.T. Wood gives the fullest summary of the conference to date.⁵⁸ What emerges from Wood (and from some of the other accounts) is, firstly, how diverse the opinions of the various prime ministers were and, secondly, how little evidence there was of a concerted attempt to force South Africa out of the Commonwealth or to get her to change her policies. This may have been a result of the efforts of Macmillan and Menzies behind the scenes to avoid a serious split over South Africa. More than likely it reflected the force of convention (which corresponded with the self-interest of most governments concerning interference in the internal affairs of member states).

Certainly, there is little evidence to support the traditional Nationalist South African view which tends to demonise the actions and personalities of the Afro-Asian prime ministers and the "maverick" white prime minister, Diefenbaker. This applies as much to the 1960 conference as it does to the more important withdrawal conference of March 1961. The fact that Macmillan found Diefenbaker particularly irritating has contributed to this demonisation of his attitude. Macmillan felt that Diefenbaker was sabotaging his attempts to get the old "white" Commonwealth countries to stick together⁵⁹ in their attempts to moderate the attitudes of the newer members. This was more revealing of how Macmillan regarded the general transformation of the modern Commonwealth than of Diefenbaker's alleged inconsistency.

⁵⁸ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", pp.156-157.

⁵⁹ Macmillan's later comment on Diefenbaker's "holier-than-thou" attitude to South Africa is especially revealing. He referred to the difficulty of persuading the "brown" and black members of the Commonwealth to moderate their attitudes when even the "Whites" were taking an anti-South African line. Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.293.

A third aspect of the 1960 conference and one which is common to all accounts was the intransigence of Eric Louw and the irritating effect he seems to have had on many of the assembled prime ministers. According to Geysler, Louw's aggressive manner created a climate in which "even a statesman of Dr Verwoerd's calibre" would have found it difficult to act. The outcome of the conference could, he said, have been different if Verwoerd had gone instead.⁶⁰ Macmillan's comment⁶¹ on Louw, the "dour Minister of External Affairs", was that he was "rude and ill-informed".

An example of Louw's effect on the others was the press conference of 4 May which created a storm of outrage and led to a clash between Louw and the Tunku of Malaysia.⁶² The Tunku accused Louw of forestalling the results of the talks and for being uncompromising and unyielding. This opinion seems to have been shared by others both at home in South Africa and abroad. Indian Opinion reported that the press conference had been "Flat, barren" and "unprofitable" and quoted the Daily Herald correspondent's view that it was the "most extraordinary - most belligerent - Press Conference that I have ever known in 38 years of reporting around the world".⁶³ The British cabinet, which had been monitoring the progress of the conference, noted the effects of Louw's "unfortunate press interview" on relations with Malaysia and the other members, saying that "as a result feelings were exacerbated".⁶⁴

As for the events of the rest of the conference, much of it was taken up by the efforts of Macmillan and Menzies to prevent any sort of split emerging on the South African problem. They had

⁶⁰ Geysler, Watershed, p.67.

⁶¹ Horne, Macmillan, p.204.

⁶² Miller, Survey, p.147.

⁶³ Indian Opinion, 13 May 1960.

⁶⁴ PRO, CAB 128/34, C.C.(60)129,4, 6 May 1960.

been unable on the first day to prevent the Tunku's attack on apartheid but Louw had agreed with Macmillan's suggestion to allow informal discussion on the apartheid question. Wood claims that Diefenbaker's response to the call for discussion of South Africa's race policies was simply to warn delegates "that the Commonwealth had not conferred a judicial role on the Conference".⁶⁵

While Macmillan had found the Tunku's press statement in criticism of Louw's press conference "offensive and [inaccurate]"⁶⁶, Louw had then angered Diefenbaker by trying to seek his opinion on the argument. At this point Macmillan began to despair about the future of the conference and he had resolved to host private discussions at Chequers on the weekend to try to find a way forward. At Chequers Macmillan tried to test the views of the others and found them varied. Nehru wanted a collective statement on apartheid and Nkrumah did not want to force South Africa out. Macmillan was delegated by them and the other guests - Menzies, the Tunku and Nash - to find a formula for keeping South Africa in.⁶⁷

But Macmillan's task was made more difficult by Louw's ignoring of the ban on formal debates of apartheid when formal plenary sessions resumed on May 9. Louw had provoked a debate on a point of order that lasted two and a half hours. This in turn led to an airing of views on apartheid which was not unwelcome to Macmillan although, as chairman, he tried to place a formal restriction on the debate.⁶⁸ But then Louw claimed the debate should not have been allowed and said there had been a press leak of the discussions. He said he would publicly deny that South Africa's affairs had been discussed.

⁶⁵ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.157.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.158.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Ghana and Nigeria had been accepted as republics on 9 and 10 May and on 10 May Louw asked the meeting whether it would similarly approve of South Africa's future application. The British cabinet had in the meantime resolved to try to persuade Louw not to make such a request "in view of the feelings already aroused on the racial question".⁶⁹ On 10 May the cabinet acknowledged it had not "proved possible to dissuade Louw" from raising the question but it appeared "unlikely" the others would oppose it.⁷⁰ It was predicted that the others would "content themselves" with taking note of the intention of the Union Government without committing themselves finally to the view that South Africa could continue in the Commonwealth if she became a republic.

The conference meeting of 10 May did agree that South Africa should remain a member of the Commonwealth but said this did not imply approval of apartheid.⁷¹ Louw had been instructed to ask the conference two questions: (a) would South Africa's continued membership as a monarchy be welcomed and (b), if so, would she also be welcome as a republic?⁷² Macmillan gave his unhesitating "yes" to the former and according to Jooste, the South African external affairs secretary, the other members seemed to agree.⁷³ But in reply to the second question Macmillan said that an unconditional guarantee by the conference would prejudice the referendum results. Diefenbaker agreed with Macmillan and cited the non-interference rule which would rule out the sanctioning of Louw's request before the referendum had taken place. Louw cited Ceylon as an example of a state which had been granted approval prior to becoming a republic but Macmillan and Diefenbaker countered this with the argument that Ceylon was a

⁶⁹ PRO, CAB128/34, C.C.(60)29, 4, 6 May 1960.

⁷⁰ C.C.(60)30, 3, 10 May 1960.

⁷¹ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.158.

⁷² Jooste, Diensherinneringe, p.194.

⁷³ Ibid.

different case because all of Ceylon's political parties had supported a republic and there was universal suffrage.⁷⁴ In South Africa, however, no blacks would be allowed to vote and the United Party opposed a republic.⁷⁵

Following on this statement Nehru had then pointed out that the referendum in South West Africa was also "significant" as it appeared to give legitimacy to South Africa's position in the territory by a "minority of the population".⁷⁶ Louw replied that South West Africa had originally been excluded from the referendum but the government regarded the situation as "anomalous" since the territory already had several representatives in the Union parliament. The referendum, however, would not change the territory's constitutional status. Menzies had been annoyed at Nehru for bringing up the question of South West Africa which, he felt, was not a Commonwealth responsibility.⁷⁷

Louw had then offered the meeting a guarantee that if the others were to assent to South Africa's future membership he would not disclose such assent before the referendum (to avoid the charge of influencing its result). Macmillan had still refused to allow this saying that if it had been a purely constitutional question there would have been no problem but that "the difficult point of timing" meant that there would be interference in the referendum process by other Commonwealth members.⁷⁸ He felt it was better to wait until the referendum results and then, if

⁷⁴ Wood, "The roles of Macmillan, Diefenbaker and Verwoerd", p.159.

⁷⁵ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.41B, Extract from the final communique, Prime Ministers' Meeting, PMM (60)13th Meeting, 13 May 1960.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.159.

⁷⁸ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.41B, Extract from the final communique, 13 March 1960.

necessary by correspondence, to get rapid assent to South Africa's request.

On 12 May difficulties arose over the wording of the final communique. Louw rejected any reference to private discussions on apartheid.⁷⁹ Nehru said it had to mention racial discrimination and the Commonwealth's position without specific reference to South Africa. Menzies would not allow that because it implied that there had been a formal debate on racialism. The Tunku and Nash then suggested a statement of the multi-racial nature of the Commonwealth and the effect of South Africa's policies on it.⁸⁰ Diefenbaker and Nehru wanted an immediate debate on this because of apartheid's international implications. Louw refused and so Macmillan's compromise was to suggest a reference both to the multi-racial character of the Commonwealth, the international effects of apartheid and Louw's stand on non-interference. Louw disagreed and said this would endanger South Africa's Commonwealth membership.

Macmillan and Home worked late at night on a draft communique, which they presented to the conference on 13 May. Macmillan had felt that the "great danger" of no agreement on the communique was that there would be a splitting of the Commonwealth into groups based on colour.⁸¹ During the discussions on 13 May Louw wanted the conference to state that South Africa would remain a member of the Commonwealth after the referendum. The others refused, and the majority of delegates then demanded specific mention of the discussions on racial discrimination.⁸² Sensing deadlock, Macmillan adjourned the conference. Menzies then berated Louw in private for being intransigent and pointed out

⁷⁹ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.159.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.160.

⁸¹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.175.

⁸² Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.160.

that his support for South Africa had cost him votes in Australia.⁸³ It was "perhaps as a consequence", says Wood, that Louw finally agreed to accept the draft.

According to Macmillan's biographer, Horne, the whole conference had been "tight-rope walking" all the way. The communique at the end was full of "double-think and double-talk".⁸⁴ This is evident from the tortuous wording of the sections dealing with non-interference and South Africa's policies. The communique emphasised that the Commonwealth was a "multi-racial association" and expressed the need for good relations between member states and peoples. It also reaffirmed the traditional principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member countries. At the same time, however, it stated that "Ministers availed themselves of Mr Louw's presence in London to have informal talks with him about the racial situation in South Africa."⁸⁵

It noted also that if South Africa were to become a republic she would have to obtain the consent of the other members to remain in the Commonwealth, either by correspondence or at a later conference of prime ministers. This latter point about correspondence caused some anxiety for British officials later. It became important for them to persuade Verwoerd to attend in person so that the African and Asian prime ministers could be brought around to accept South Africa's continued membership.

Macmillan was satisfied that the unity of the Commonwealth had been saved, at least for the time being, "without any sacrifice of principle".⁸⁶ But he also knew that it was "at best a papering-over job, deferring the moment of decision at the latest

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Horne, Macmillan, p.205.

⁸⁵ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.176.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

to the following year's meeting".⁸⁷

In South Africa Nationalist spokesmen declared satisfaction with the results of the London conference and tried to place the most optimistic interpretation they could on the question of future membership of the Commonwealth. A parliamentary statement read out by the minister of internal affairs, T.E. Dönges, said that the republic had not been an issue concerning South Africa's future membership of the Commonwealth and that any other interpretation would mean South Africa was being discriminated against.⁸⁸ He claimed that the negative response by some local and foreign commentators was an attempt at "affecting Government popularity" and a way of influencing the referendum. But the principle of non-interference had been upheld and there had been an "unambiguous yes answer" to South Africa's question whether South Africa would be welcome in the Commonwealth after a republic had been introduced. South Africa had, furthermore, been prepared to lay out and explain its policy towards blacks at the conference.

Press reactions to the conference in South Africa were diverse. Die Burger noted with satisfaction on 5 May that South Africa's race policies were not discussed officially at the conference.⁸⁹ On 6 May Die Transvaler praised Eric Louw for his defence of South Africa and criticised the Tunku of Malaysia for his remarks on Louw's press conference.⁹⁰ On 10 May Die Transvaler said that the Commonwealth might aggravate the problem for South Africa of outside interference and that the Commonwealth was disintegrating anyway. Continued membership might be too high a price to pay for maintaining "white civilisation".⁹¹

⁸⁷ Horne, Macmillan, p.205.

⁸⁸ South African Digest, Vol.7, No. 10, 13 May 1960.

⁸⁹ Die Burger, 5 May 1960.

⁹⁰ Die Transvaler, 6 May 1960.

⁹¹ Die Transvaler, 10 May 1960.

The English South African newspapers were on the whole critical of Louw and they took a "sympathetic" view of the Tunku dispute (which they blamed on Louw).⁹² They also tended to praise Macmillan and Menzies and the "old Commonwealth" friends for avoiding a split. They noted that the question of membership of the Commonwealth was now very much open despite the republican issue. The Star, however, expressed the hope on the eve of the conference that the Commonwealth would "recognise diversity" and not examine "too closely" each country's reasons for being members. In that way it would avoid "self-righteousness and cant" about South Africa's merits and demerits as a member.⁹³

The British high commission in South Africa noted that the local press had reported Sauer, Dönges and Naudé as saying that Commonwealth membership was simply a matter of form and convention.⁹⁴ It noted that the "moderate" Afrikaans newspapers such as Die Burger were saying that South Africa came out of the conference "rather well" and that the principle of non-interference was upheld. They were also hoping that those who had exerted themselves to preserve the unity of the Commonwealth would do it again when the formal request came up.

The high commission also reported on the "divisions" in the National Party between "moderates" and "extremists" as represented by Die Burger and Die Transvaler. It surmised that the former had refrained from attacking the latter for the sake of a "show of solidarity" over the republic but noted that the moderates saw Louw's presence in London as "tragic".⁹⁵ The moderates were putting a "brave face" on the fact that no reassurances about Commonwealth membership emerged from the

⁹² Rand Daily Mail, 5 May 1960, The Star, 5 and 6 May 1960.

⁹³ The Star, 2 May 1960.

⁹⁴ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.44, High Commission Cape Town - Secretary of State, CRO, 14 May 1960.

⁹⁵ No.45, High Commissioner - Secretary of State, CRO, 14 May 1960.

conference. The reaction of Transvaal ministers was, however, "awaited with interest". The UP, on the other hand, had expressed "private satisfaction" that Verwoerd was unlikely to get assurances of membership and this "helps their anti-republican campaign".

Indian Opinion's assessment expressed, perhaps, the feelings of most of the voteless majority in South Africa about the conference. It expressed disappointment that the attempt to have South Africa's racial policies put on the official agenda had "failed". An "East-West alignment" was taking place in the Commonwealth itself "under the cover of diplomatic usage and Commonwealth conventions".⁹⁶ The "European countries" of the Commonwealth, "or more correctly the white countries, led by Britain", were more sympathetic to the "cause of White South Africa than to the interests of plain, downright humanity", and a "line-up of Afro-Asian countries against the "White countries" was taking place with Britain taking the role of a "biased chairman". The newspaper called on the Commonwealth to make clear its stand for "principles of democracy and justice irrespective of colour" or to admit that it was divided into two camps, white and non-white over the South African issue. It was not likely that the Afro-Asian countries would "continue to accept the hesitation of Britain on the subject of honesty and justice in South Africa".

Later, Indian Opinion claimed that the communique at the end of the conference had merely concealed "cracks in the Commonwealth" and that the "impassable gulfs" dividing the members would mean that if there were to be another conference it would be to "bury the remains".⁹⁷ It went on to belittle the "pretence" that there was any unity left in the Commonwealth.

What was needed, claimed Indian Opinion, was to build a "true

⁹⁶ Indian Opinion, 6 May 1960.

⁹⁷ Indian Opinion, 10 June 1960.

Commonwealth" inside which one standard of human values was guaranteed to all members".

Chapter 18: From Conference to Referendum, May to October 1960(a) Macmillan's post-conference diplomacy

After the May conference Macmillan's efforts to contain the political "fall-out" from the Sharpeville incident and other political developments related to South Africa's future Commonwealth membership redoubled. Much correspondence between the British high commissioner, Sir John Maud, and the Commonwealth relations office took place, as well as between the prime ministers themselves, about this issue. The main theme, as far as British policy-makers were concerned, seemed to have been the need to persuade Verwoerd not to go ahead with the referendum until the atmosphere had calmed down. Macmillan, fearing South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth, tried to persuade the other prime ministers to accept South Africa's continued membership if the republic were introduced. Verwoerd and Louw, from their side, refused to consider any sort of concessions on racial policy and held steadfastly to their line that Commonwealth membership would be "automatic" and that Macmillan and the other "white" prime ministers were duty bound to help South Africa achieve this aim.

Macmillan was split between his desire to keep South Africa in and his feeling that Verwoerd and Louw were being less than honourable in their refusal to accept his warnings that unless some concessions were forthcoming South Africa's membership was in jeopardy. From their side, Verwoerd and Louw were not above using threats if Britain did not support their membership strategy. Threats of economic retaliation and also the threat of a veto on the membership of other new members such as Cyprus were communicated on various occasions to the British.

In the meantime the political temperature was raised by Nkrumah's muffled threat in a statement in Dublin shortly after the May conference that if a future South African republic refused to uphold UNO principles Ghana would find it

"embarrassing" to remain with such a republic in the Commonwealth.¹ This was followed by the June conference of independent African states in Addis Ababa which urged African Commonwealth members to take all steps necessary to exclude South Africa from the Commonwealth. The same conference also adopted wide ranging economic sanctions against South Africa and, in July, Ghana demanded that any South African visitors to Ghana make a formal renunciation of policies of racial discrimination.

The Tunku stated in the Malayan parliament in June 1960 that he would ask the others whether they would subscribe to any measures Malaya would take against South Africa.² Nehru said in August that he had written to the others about India's attitude and that of the other members. Miller points out how Menzies's initiated considerable correspondence with Verwoerd in which he tried to persuade the latter to be more flexible but found that Verwoerd would not budge an inch on racial policy.³ Menzies urged Verwoerd to present the future republican application in person, not by correspondence, so the "frankest" possible discussion could ensue on the procedures and principles of Commonwealth membership. He also stated his belief that people like himself, Macmillan, Nash and Diefenbaker would think it a misfortune if South Africa were not in the Commonwealth.⁴

Ghana and Malaya had adopted an economic boycott of South Africa in response to the Addis Ababa conference and were soon to be joined by Tanganyika. In August Macmillan wrote to Nkrumah what Horne calls a "sagacious letter in the light of subsequent history", saying it was difficult for any country to "modify its way at the behest of outside critics" as opposed to internal

¹ Miller, Survey, p.149

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., pp.149-50.

⁴ Ibid., p.150.

pressures.⁵ External pressure, said Macmillan, could "harden" opinion inside South Africa. The United Kingdom on the other hand favoured "patience and persuasion".

In July and August Macmillan had also warned Verwoerd that if the republican referendum gave a "yes" answer some countries might oppose South Africa's application for continued membership. Verwoerd in return "appreciated" that if it were to be so, South Africa would have to be outside the Commonwealth.⁶ He would "never give a single inch on anything" said Macmillan years later.⁷

Macmillan stated in his memoirs that the Tunku and Nkrumah had shown themselves ready to take a moderate line on South Africa's re-admission. He claimed that his August letter to Nkrumah "seemed to have paid off"⁸ but that Diefenbaker remained a "threat" - a claim which, as we shall see in a later chapter, was to a large extent unfounded.

Back at home in South Africa the lines were being drawn between the political parties on the republican referendum. In March Verwoerd had warned the UP that if it continued to claim the referendum would be meaningless without the participation of other population groups, it would provoke the government into adopting other "harsher" methods of bringing about a republic, namely by bare parliamentary majority.⁹

Die Transvaler, in support of Verwoerd's statement (which had caused an uproar in the opposition ranks), denied that this warning meant intimidation or any other means of influencing the

⁵ Horne, Macmillan, p.391.

⁶ Ibid., p.392.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ House of Assembly Debates, col.3767, 21 March 1960.

vote as the opposition had accused Verwoerd of doing, but said that it simply meant that republicans would work harder to achieve a republic if the referendum failed.¹⁰ If the "other methods" of bringing about a republic referred to by Verwoerd became necessary it would be the UP leadership's "own foolishness" that had made such measures necessary.

On 22 April the second reading of the Referendum bill had taken place and De Villiers Graaff had tried to move an amendment which rejected the idea of a referendum at such an "inopportune" time in the country's history. Other grounds for its rejection were its failure to guarantee South Africa's continued membership of the Commonwealth and the exclusion of "a section of the electorate" (the coloureds) from the voting.¹¹ De Villiers Graaff denied, however, that the 24000 coloured voters would affect the referendum results to any extent.

During the same debate Dr J. Steytler moved a Progressive Party amendment to the Referendum bill which demanded a postponement of the referendum until South Africa's "internal" and "external" security was assured by participation of "all sections of the population" in the constitution and by continued Commonwealth membership.¹² This was followed by Margaret Ballinger's amendment demanding the participation of the black population in the referendum and declaring that the relations between the races were "never so bad" as at "present".¹³ Furthermore, she argued, the republic would not necessarily bring English and Afrikaner together and that Afrikaner nationalism was an "utterly selfish, self-centred religion".¹⁴

¹⁰ Die Transvaler, 25 March 1960.

¹¹ House of Assembly Debates, col.5885, 22 April 1960.

¹² Ibid., col.5929, 25 April 1960.

¹³ Ibid., col.5951, 25 April 1960.

¹⁴ Ibid., col.5956, 25 April 1960.

Ballinger's position in parliament was then in danger for at the end of the previous parliamentary session the Nationalists had forced through legislation to deprive the natives representatives of their seats. Margaret Ballinger was then in her last session of parliament and had been returned by her constituency every year since 1936.¹⁵

(b) Maud's advice to London: "Keep South Africa in"

After the May Commonwealth conference and as the referendum campaign began to heat up, the British high commissioner, Sir John Maud, began to warn London of the dangers of allowing Verwoerd to claim that South Africa's future Commonwealth membership was assured if South Africa were to become a republic. On 6 June he wrote that he had communicated his surprise to Jooste, the Union's secretary of external affairs, that Verwoerd had said after the Commonwealth conference that South Africa's application after becoming a republic would be just a formality.¹⁶ He was also surprised to find that Jooste accepted this as well, despite the minutes of the May prime ministers' meeting having indicated otherwise. Maud was also "indignant" at Nehru's remark in Dublin "that it was all a matter of timing and procedure". Maud asked Jooste if Louw was serious about wanting South Africa to remain in the Commonwealth after his remark about the organisation rapidly becoming a "mini UNO" with up to twenty new members. Jooste assured Maud that both he and Louw were "full of support for the value of the Commonwealth in the world". On apartheid, however, Jooste claimed there would be no concessions but rather "short cuts" which would meet some of the criticisms of South Africa before the next Commonwealth meeting.

Maud reported that the UP and PP did not share Verwoerd's view of the outcome of the May conference and that De Villiers Graaff

¹⁵ Indian Opinion, 10 June 1960.

¹⁶ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.48, Extract from a letter to Sir Alexander Clutterbuck from Sir John Maud, 9 June 1960.

had warned at a UP rally that South Africa might not be accepted as a republic by the rest of the Commonwealth. This would be "the major theme of the referendum campaign", Maud surmised.

In mid-June Macmillan undertook a major reshuffle of his cabinet in which Lord Home was moved to foreign affairs, to be replaced by Duncan Sandys, his former "hatchet man" from the defence portfolio.¹⁷ On the 7 July the new Commonwealth secretary wrote to Maud saying that a speech by Verwoerd at Groblersdal had been reported prominently in Britain. Verwoerd had said that the "old Commonwealth" plus India would push South Africa's membership through.¹⁸ Sandys asked Maud whether Louw must have given Verwoerd the wrong impression of the conference "for his own sake". Reports of Verwoerd's speech had resulted in the colonial secretary having to say after a question in the Commons that the communique had emphasized no decision would be taken until after the referendum and that no undertaking had been given by the British government.

Sandys went on to tell Maud he felt sure Ghana, Malaysia and Nigeria would vote against South Africa's membership on the grounds of the Union's race policies and on the grounds that it was a referendum by a "minority of whites". His next telegram would contain a draft letter to Verwoerd about this. It was "tempting", he said, to suggest to Verwoerd two concessions that might reduce Commonwealth hostility: (1) that he should give the coloureds the vote and representation in parliament (by coloureds) and (2) that Africans should have some say in white areas concerning "legislation in early stages". There was no guarantee, however, that these reforms would in fact "stave off a Commonwealth crisis".

The draft letter to Verwoerd said that Britain did not commit itself in advance but just hoped that South Africa would stay a

¹⁷ Horne, Macmillan, p.242.

¹⁸ DO 119, File 1206, No.51, Sandys - Maud, 7 July 1960.

member of the Commonwealth.¹⁹ The letter warned that aspects of South African policy were likely to be criticised by one or more members as had happened in May and that "we should then be faced with a sharp divergence of views on an issue of major importance, namely membership, on which collective agreement is required". A "critical situation" could thus be created, the result of which could not be forecast. There were, however, certain proposals which the prime ministers had in mind that he thought could help the situation (the extension of coloured and African political participation mentioned earlier).

Maud's reply expressed agreement with the draft and said it was necessary if only to "put the record straight" with Verwoerd in case of "recriminations" that the British had led him "up the garden path" concerning membership.²⁰ However, "nothing we say will deter him from his line that the Commonwealth will accept him" because he needed it for "propaganda purposes". Verwoerd did not "really care" for the Commonwealth anyway. Maud suggested that Sandys's proposal to Verwoerd to make two concessions be deleted from the draft letter as it "would probably not have the desired effect".

The final letter to Verwoerd (sent on 13 July by Macmillan)²¹ contained all the above points except the reforms suggested by Sandys. It referred to the Groblersdal speech and warned "there would be more than one Commonwealth country which despite the practice adopted hitherto would for reasons of policy oppose the continued membership of South Africa".²²

In July a briefing for Maud to present to the CRO was drawn up

¹⁹ No.52, Draft letter from Commonwealth Secretary to Verwoerd, 7 July 1960.

²⁰ No.53, Maud - Secretary of State, CRO, 8 July 1960.

²¹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.285-286.

²² PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.54, Secretary of State, CRO - Maud, 13 July 1960.

by the high commission which mainly confined itself to a "Prognosis on the Republic".²³ It stated that it seemed "certain" the Nationalists would win the referendum, especially after the "offensive" by Ghana and Malaya (sanctions against South Africa). There would be a division between "Boer" and "Briton" on party lines with only the Progressive Party arguing for a "non-racial republic". Verwoerd was likely to announce the date for the referendum in August for sometime in October and, despite warnings, was likely to campaign on the assumption Commonwealth membership was a formality and that the "Old Commonwealth" would "ensure the new members stick to the rules". Ghana and Malaya were "likely to oppose" South Africa's application although Pakistan's prime minister had said in June that South Africa should remain in the club so as to be under the influence of the rest of the Commonwealth.

Britain would find it an "awkward precedent" if South Africa were to be expelled and it was in her interests to keep South Africa in as well in the interests of the black population. Throwing out South Africa would "reduce influence" over her and the interests of the "whole population" should be considered. The Commonwealth "ideal" was to "work together despite differences" and the new Commonwealth would only be "playing Verwoerd's game" by expulsion. It was suggested that perhaps Macmillan should begin writing to the other prime ministers in his capacity as chairman of the previous conference to "gauge views" and to set out a case for continued membership as well as to get the "old Commonwealth's views in putting the case to the new Commonwealth".

On 2 August Sandys wrote to Maud to tell him that the South African high commissioner in London had written to tell him that the referendum date of 5 October would be announced by Verwoerd the following day and that if the result was in favour of a

²³ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.59, Secret Brief for the High Commissioner's Visit to London: Prognosis on a Republic, July 1960.

republic, the Union would "make the customary request to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers that after the establishment of the republic the Union of South Africa be permitted to retain its membership of the Commonwealth".²⁴

A copy of a letter from Macmillan to Verwoerd was sent the same day with the request to Maud to pass it on to Verwoerd. It expressed Macmillan's "deep concern at the dangers which may be involved for the cohesion of the Commonwealth if such a course is embarked upon at the present time".²⁵ It stated that he (Macmillan) had received messages concerning the referendum that made this letter to Verwoerd necessary. "Difficulties" had increased since the July letter he had sent Verwoerd and it was now very probable that some countries would oppose South Africa's membership. He warned of possibly all the "non-European" countries opposing South Africa and the "painful results likely to follow from a division of the Commonwealth on racial lines on an issue of such importance for us all".

So seriously indeed do I view the prospects that I feel impelled to ask you in all friendship and with the Union's interests uppermost in my mind to reflect before proceeding with your announcement at this juncture. Taking a long-term view would it not serve your interests better to postpone it until times in Africa are calmer? To secure a breathing space amid all these fast-flowing developments would be very valuable.

Notwithstanding this advice, on 3 August Verwoerd went ahead and announced that the voting date for the referendum would be 5 October. In a broadcast on the SABC he declared that only when the constitutional problem of a republic had been disposed of

²⁴ File 1206, No.61, Sandys - Maud, 2 August 1960.

²⁵ File 1206, No.62, Sandys - Maud, 2 August 1960.

would racial tension slacken and economic growth resume.²⁶

In his reply to Macmillan's letter Verwoerd said that the decision to hold the referendum in October was taken after "careful consideration" and that it would be "quite impossible to reverse" it.²⁷ South Africa did not want to create "divisions" in the Commonwealth and could not help it if certain states were allowed to pursue a "feud" against her domestic policy. This would not deter South Africa from adopting a constitution which had been "accepted and even welcomed" in the case of other Commonwealth countries. The "aspirations" and needs and rights of her people would not be helped by postponing the referendum and a postponement, under the pressure of countries like Ghana, would only "intensify demands" and lengthen the uncertainties with "adverse" effects economically and in terms of "social order" in South Africa. He ended by saying he valued Macmillan's friendship and that of Britain as a whole and hoped co-operation would be developed and maintained whatever happened.

On the day of the referendum announcement Sandys wrote to Maud to state that a message had been sent by Macmillan to all the other prime ministers saying that "We cannot tell in advance what the result of the referendum may be but if it should be in favour of a republic it is clear from the discussions at our meeting in May that very difficult issues may arise for us all."²⁸ If he was asked about the Commonwealth attitude he would say it was "purely a matter for the country concerned" and would refuse to be drawn on the British government attitude. It was for each Commonwealth government to decide what to say if they were asked but that it would be in the general Commonwealth interest "if we could all say as little as possible at this stage".

²⁶ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.328.

²⁷ PRO,DO 119, File 1206, No.66, Secretary of External Affairs, South Africa - J.B. Johnstone, Deputy High Commissioner, 4 August 1960.

²⁸ File 1206, No.65, Sandys - Maud, 3 August 1960.

Nkrumah was reported by the British high commissioner in Accra to have agreed with Macmillan's message. However, Nkrumah had also said that it was "what happens after [the referendum] that is important". Nkrumah would not refer in full to the issue yet but if forced to would place as much emphasis on South Africa's possible expulsion as on the republican constitution.²⁹ Macmillan reported that Nehru had said it would not be possible to avoid all reference to "considerations relevant to the question of South Africa's retention of its membership".³⁰

Canada had also responded to the referendum announcement and Diefenbaker had said in the Canadian House of Commons that it was "for South Africa to decide" and that Canada had given no undertaking in advance in May as it would have been an interference with the referendum process.³¹ By September, as we shall see, however, Diefenbaker was having second thoughts about this and was expressing reservations about the general British approach to the question.

A message was also received by the CRO from Wellington outlining Nash's view which was in agreement with Macmillan that it would be generally in the Commonwealth interest if "we could all say as little as possible at this stage".³² Nash felt Verwoerd's statement after the May talks had been "contrary to the facts and the spirit of the confidential view expressed at the meeting". He feared that Louw and Verwoerd would continue to claim the others would agree to South Africa's future membership, but he felt that was "not at all likely" and that Ghana, Nigeria and Malaya were not favourable to the idea. He hoped some way could

²⁹ No.69 UK High Commissioner, Accra - C.R.O, London, 4 August 1960.

³⁰ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.287.

³¹ PRO, DO.119, File 1206, No.70, Sandys - Maud, 6 August 1960.

³² No.71, UK High Commission, Wellington - Secretary of State, CRO, 10 August 1960.

be found "to ensure that the real facts of the situation and the somewhat bleak prospects of retention of Commonwealth membership are understood by the South African Government".

A later note stated that Nash and his external affairs secretary, McIntosh, had amended this statement. They now suggested that all Commonwealth leaders "take steps to ensure that the Union Government" was not under any misapprehension" about the possible consequences of the referendum on South Africa's future membership of the Commonwealth. They felt that South African ministers had been "disingenuous" and that some effort should be made to counteract the "deliberate misleading" of South African public opinion.³³

On 11 August the CRO asked Maud for information on what type of majority was expected for the republicans in the referendum. He was also asked to ascertain whether the South African public was aware that membership could be refused and what effect it would have on the result if this was made "unequivocally plain" to them.³⁴ Maud wrote back to say that (a) there was already a 60%-40% split in the Afrikaner - English ratio in the population and that some Afrikaners in the UP and PP were likely to vote for the republic thus giving the Nationalists a "modest majority"; (b) that most voters were aware of the possibility of expulsion and that Verwoerd's 3 August announcement of the referendum had "eliminated any lingering confusion" in that regard ; and (c) that a more forthright effort to enlighten the public would have little effect since most Afrikaners were "committed anyway" to the republic with or without the Commonwealth.³⁵

The UP's attempts to "frighten the floating vote" with predictions of economic disaster if South Africa left the

³³ No.72, UK High Commissioner, Wellington - CRO (repeated to Pretoria), 10 August 1960.

³⁴ No.73, CRO (Clutterbuck) - Maud, 11 August 1960.

³⁵ No.75, Maud - CRO (Clutterbuck), 12 August 1960.

Commonwealth were offset by propaganda from the NP that pointed out the examples of Ireland and Burma and that claimed that "mutual self-interest" would prevail. There was also the "growing feeling" that Ghana, Malaya, etc. "should be resisted". There was also the Nationalist propaganda that it might be against South Africa's interest to stay in a multi-racial Commonwealth "dominated by the Afro-Asian countries" anyway.

Maud added some further thoughts in another telegram of 13 August and gave some advice on British policy.³⁶ The whole drift of his argument was that Britain should keep South Africa in the Commonwealth "in the hope of the Union's eventual redemption" and because of the possibility of some "enemy or rival" inheriting Britain's position. He used the example of Britain and the West "sitting it out" with the Russians in UNO and argued the same for South Africa. Britain might still keep South Africa in if she "managed the operation" correctly. Britain could persuade the others by playing strongly the "line" that people not governments were being punished by expulsion. Macmillan and Menzies could exchange ideas on this at "early stages" first with Nehru, Nkrumah and the others and then with Diefenbaker and Nash who could be "sold" on the outcome without difficulty. "I am sure", he wrote, "if we do not take a discreet but firm grip of the situation we shall finish with South Africa out of the Commonwealth".

The urgency which British officials were beginning to feel concerning the question of South Africa's future membership was increased by threatening public statements emanating from Nationalist ministers such as Eric Louw. On 16 August Eric Louw made a speech at a republican rally in Paarl which referred to "scare stories" from the UP about economic damage that would follow expulsion.³⁷ He said that in the "unlikely event" of Ghana and India achieving expulsion South Africa in any event held the

³⁶ No.76, Maud - CRO (Clutterbuck), 13 August 1960.

³⁷ Die Transvaler, 17 August, 1960.

"trump cards" in the form of gold and other minerals if Britain refused to sign a bilateral trade agreement. Such an agreement, he said, would not be prohibited by GATT as De Villiers Graaff had predicted. This speech was reported by the high commission to the CRO on 19 August with the comment that Die Transvaler was a "reliable mouthpiece of the NP" and that although the UP had already described Louw's statement as "irresponsible", "it may reflect the views of at least some NP ministers and we may hear it again as the campaign hots up".³⁸

In late August Verwoerd announced at a republican rally in Lichtenburg that he would end the state of emergency on or before 5 October because he did not want anyone to feel that he was not completely free to vote as he thought he should.³⁹ (It was lifted on 31 August). He admitted that South Africa derived certain economic advantages from the Commonwealth but said these should not be over-exaggerated. Preferences were not as important as before. He also recognised that Commonwealth membership was a matter of "mind and heart" for English South Africans.

At a meeting in Johannesburg, Dr Steytler of the Progressive Party declared, on the other hand, that the referendum was a choice to "live in harmony with or to fight fellow black South Africans". The only reason why Verwoerd had come forward with the republican issue at that point in time was that "he wants to cover up the mess he has made of race relations in South Africa".⁴⁰

Even private companies entered the fray over the republic as a letter in the Dönges collection illustrated. A certain Edward Searle of Edward Searle and Company in Cape Town sent a circular to his staff advising "deep and careful thought" about the

³⁸ DO 119, File 1206, No.77A, T.W. Aston, Pretoria - D.E. Richards, CRO, 19 August 1960.

³⁹ South African Digest, Vol.7, No.17, 19 August 1960, p.5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.6.

republican referendum to his employees.⁴¹ The circular noted that much "misunderstanding among working people" existed about the role of the monarchy in South Africa, but that the queen could not just "hand over South Africa" to the blacks as had happened in the Congo - but that she was "just a figurehead" who could not overrule the Union government. However, the loss of economic preferences if South Africa had to leave the Commonwealth was "serious". His firm would have to "reduce staff after 1961" if South Africa left the Commonwealth because it dealt primarily with imports and exports.

In the meantime Eric Louw was displaying an attitude of mingled threats and inducements in discussions with the British high commissioner, Maud. On 20 August Maud cabled Sandys to say that he had spoken to Louw who suggested to him that if Ghana vetoed South Africa's application and if Britain did nothing to ensure South Africa's membership, South Africa could use its gold and minerals as bargaining chips or could indeed sell them elsewhere.⁴² Maud had "evaded questions" from Louw about the "unanimity rule" at Commonwealth conferences and said that Macmillan was just worried about "the timing of the present problem".

Louw had then "flourished" the possibility of the governor-general delaying legislation for the republic and thus, in effect, allowing South Africa to remain in the Commonwealth; then, in more threatening vein, of South Africa using its veto to exclude Ghana and Nigeria and others. Maud asked him when South Africa intended to present her application but Louw replied it was not yet settled and he preferred it not to be by correspondence but rather at a prime ministers' meeting. The high commissioner concluded: "He clearly sees the advantages of

⁴¹ CA, A1646 (Dönges Collection), (e) MIN Correspondence Files, Vol.331 (Republic: 1953 July - 1961 May), Circular Letter by E. Searle and Co. to employees, 1 September 1960.

⁴² PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.79, Maud - Sandys, 20 August 1960.

playing the Commonwealth issue as long as possible although one cannot count on his persuading Verwoerd to this view."

Sandys cabled Maud on 30 August to say he had spoken to Van Rhijn, the South African high commissioner in London and had asked him if Verwoerd really wanted South Africa to stay in the Commonwealth.⁴³ Van Rhijn had replied that earlier it had not been so but now Verwoerd saw the Commonwealth's value in a "troubled world". He also saw the value of economic preferences, particularly for the "politically important farmers" whose support he valued. He said Verwoerd was "deeply committed" to the line that South Africa would remain a member after becoming a republic and did not want to be "proved wrong".

Sandys then suggested he might want to discuss the line to take with "potentially hostile members" and asked whether legislation could be delayed as long as possible to allow tempers to "cool". He also urged Van Rhijn to tell Verwoerd not to apply by correspondence but rather to attend a prime ministers' meeting where the "steadying influence" of some Commonwealth members could be used. He urged delay while "like-minded governments" considered. Van Rhijn had promised to communicate the gist of what Sandys said.

Maud cabled back on the same day to warn Sandys that Verwoerd might use the tactic of postponement to get the maximum commitment by Britain to use her influence to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth and that he was also "unpredictable" and could raise all sorts of issues such as the high commission territories.⁴⁴ Maud thus recommended an informal meeting between Verwoerd and the Commonwealth secretary when the latter visited the Federation in the following month and that this would avoid press speculation about the subject of talks. (The meeting was rendered unnecessary by Louw's talks with Macmillan in Scotland

⁴³ No.80, Sandys - Maud, 30 August 1960.

⁴⁴ No 81, Maud - Sandys, 30 August, 1960.

on 7 September in which Verwoerd's views were then communicated directly to the British prime minister).

On 31 August Sandys asked Maud for comment on an editorial in the Financial Times of Johannesburg (29 August) which had suggested that voters should support the republic in order to give Verwoerd the chance to introduce reforms in coloured representation, bantu affairs, bantu trade unions, etc. The article had stated that such reforms would make it likely that South Africa would be accepted at the Commonwealth meeting and that boycotts would end.⁴⁵

Maud cabled in return to say the article reflected "un-objective political propaganda" inspired by Johannesburg business interests "who were putting their money on a republic" and wanted to "whip in" English voters. However, Verwoerd was the "High Priest of Apartheid" and was unlikely to abandon it for the sake of Commonwealth membership for which he "feels nothing". Verwoerd had "said as much" in his personal letter to Macmillan of 2 August. Modifications to the Pass Laws, the Liquor laws, etc. were being canvassed "solely to appease Cape Nationalists" and English/Afrikaans business interests "worried about their international image". It did not "involve any change in basic apartheid".⁴⁶

In the meantime Macmillan had written to Menzies about what to do about a republic and Sandys enclosed this message in a telegram for Maud.⁴⁷ Macmillan had asked Menzies for his views first and stated that he then intended to speak to Diefenbaker and Nash about an approach to Nehru and other new members about delaying legislation in the Union and about persuading Verwoerd not to apply by correspondence but to wait preferably until the next prime ministers' meeting. He hoped to appeal to the new

⁴⁵ Nos.83 and 84, Sandys - Maud, 31 August 1960.

⁴⁶ No.85, Maud - Sandys, 2 September, 1960.

⁴⁷ No.86, Sandys - Maud, 29 August 1960.

members to "impress upon the Afro-Asians" the need for Commonwealth solidarity and to keep South Africa in for the sake of the black majority.

The first fruits of this approach seem to have been harvested in early September when Nkrumah indicated he would not oppose South Africa's membership. On the 9th of September Sandys met Nkrumah and reported to Maud that he had persuaded Nkrumah not to oppose South Africa's membership.⁴⁸ Nkrumah had at first said he would oppose South Africa because of public opinion but after some thought had agreed not to although he reserved the right to attack apartheid at the next Commonwealth meeting. He went to the length of adding that it was important not to give Verwoerd the impression that South Africa might be refused because he might therefore decide not to make an application at all "rather than risk the indignity of rejection".

Although the Tunku of Malaysia had not been as accommodating in his reply it seems that Verwoerd was encouraged enough by Macmillan's campaign to send Louw to Scotland, where Macmillan was on holiday, to discuss further approaches.⁴⁹ Macmillan was irritated by Louw's approach which, as a letter from Sandys indicated, included his usual tactless threats and complaints. Macmillan was told that if the unanimity rule applied and Ghana vetoed South Africa, Verwoerd would establish a republic outside the Commonwealth but would sign a trade agreement with Britain.⁵⁰ However, he had then also threatened that Verwoerd's attitude to Cyprus's application would depend on the attitude of the others to South Africa.

Louw had gone on to suggest a special prime ministers' meeting

⁴⁸ No.90, UK High Commission, Accra to CRO and Pretoria, 9 September 1960.

⁴⁹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.288.

⁵⁰ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.92, Sandys - Maud, 9 September 1960.

in 1961 to discuss the South African application and said that draft legislation would be introduced in January. He suggested that Macmillan should not support the unanimity rule at prime ministers' meetings on questions of substance as opposed to procedure. Macmillan replied there was in theory no "binding" rule on unanimity and that it was just past "precedent" but felt the need for an informal meeting to clear it up. Louw then suggested that the whole issue could be expressed "positively" rather than "negatively" by means of a direct motion stating that South Africa's request for membership was to be denied. This would mean that South Africa could also veto any refusal to accept her request for continued membership.

Sandys reported to Maud that his impression was that Louw's meeting with Macmillan was purely for the purpose of the referendum and was not related to any "genuine concern about Commonwealth membership".⁵¹ Louw had also met the minister of state for Commonwealth relations, G. Alport, and had discussed South West Africa and the Ghana/Tanganyika boycotts. It seems that he had indicated some concessions concerning the South African reaction to the boycotts and to the issue, then becoming embarrassing to Britain, of political refugees in the high commission territories. Alport had advised Sandys to contact Verwoerd about the necessity for flexibility on SWA and reported that Louw had agreed not make a public protest about the boycotts in the hope that they would "peter out". Louw also told Alport that South Africa planned "no drastic action" in connection with political refugees (in the high commission territories) and would allow the rest to be airlifted out of Bechuanaland that week.

In the interim a minor clash between Britain and Canada was developing on the issue of the unanimity rule and South Africa's future membership. Diefenbaker seems to have been less than happy about the British approach which he saw as being too accommodating to Verwoerd. On 19 September Diefenbaker had made

⁵¹ File 1206, No.93, Sandys - Maud, 9 September 1960.

a speech in which he had claimed that: "As consent to [South Africa's] membership required unanimity these words become significant and important."⁵² But almost at the same time a contradictory statement in Washington by Lord Home, the British foreign secretary, had been reported by Toronto newspapers. They reported an "ambiguous" answer on South Africa's Commonwealth membership from the British foreign secretary at a press conference in Washington. This answer clashed with Diefenbaker's statement on 19 September. The British statement could be taken as support for Verwoerd's "racist" policies, claimed the Canadians.⁵³ It also meant that "some South Africans could be persuaded that they can pursue their policies of race repression without endangering their Commonwealth membership".

On 24 September the Canadian high commissioner for the UK in Ottawa cabled Maud to say that Diefenbaker was "seriously exercised" by the South African situation.⁵⁴ He was worried about appearing out of step with Britain concerning Lord Home's Washington statement but felt that South Africa was now claiming that the old Commonwealth would work to keep South Africa in. Louw had claimed this after the London conference and so Diefenbaker had made a statement on the unanimity rule on 19 September. He felt there was some ambiguity about the British approach to Verwoerd. Verwoerd should be persuaded not to go ahead with the republic until he was sure of a bigger majority and to allow time for things to cool off in the hope that this would improve South Africa's relations with the UNO through the Hammarskjöld talks. Canada was seriously "worried" and wanted the opinions of the others on what to do.

On the same day Home apologised to Diefenbaker for any

⁵² No.97A, High Commission, Ottawa - CRO (repeated for Pretoria), 20 September 1960.

⁵³ No.97B, Sandys - Maud, 23 September 1960.

⁵⁴ No.98, UK High Commissioner, Ottawa - Maud, 24 September 1960.

"embarrassment" he might have caused the latter by his press conference in Washington and said he had been unaware of Diefenbaker's speech at the same time and that his was on "different but related issues".⁵⁵ He had just said that it was better to have South Africa in the Commonwealth where it could be influenced while Diefenbaker was stressing the unanimity rule.

Some damage had been done, however, to the anti-republican campaign in South Africa by Home's statements. They had been used by Senator De Klerk in parliament. De Klerk had said that Home's statement that everyone must try to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth led to the

undoing of intimidating stories that South Africa would be kicked out.... A Minister of External Affairs does not talk without the permission of his Premier and what Lord Home said is the word of Britain. I don't know what new stories the monarchists will offer in an attempt to intimidate the people; South Africa will not be kicked out.⁵⁶

On 29 August Verwoerd again addressed the question of Commonwealth membership in a speech to a special congress of the NP in Bloemfontein. He said that the government's "honest and upright principle" was that South Africa would stay in the Commonwealth as long as the nature of the organisation remained such as to make it possible for the Union to remain.⁵⁷ He said he was "proud" of the English speakers who were in "increasing numbers" coming forward to declare themselves in favour of a republic and reiterated that a republic would be the only means

⁵⁵ No.99, UK Mission to UNO, New York - UK High Commission, Ottawa, 23 September 1960.

⁵⁶ No.99A, E.J. Emery, Pretoria - R.G. Britten, CRO, 27 September 1960.

⁵⁷ Die Transvaler, 30 August 1960.

of achieving "true unity". He would not, however, apologise for the fact there were no English speakers in the cabinet and claimed that when his party was in opposition no Afrikaner nationalist had demanded representation in Smuts's cabinet.

De Villiers Graaff replied to this by way of a special message to the readers of The Friend of Bloemfontein and claimed that Verwoerd's republic would jeopardise South Africa's Commonwealth membership, whatever Verwoerd said, and would place the country in danger of further international isolation at a crucial time in the Cold War. Voting "No" would, on the other hand, leave the question of Commonwealth membership open and make it possible to "amend" the decision later whereas a "Yes" vote would be irrevocable.⁵⁸

A few days before the referendum Eric Louw took the London Times to task for criticising South Africa's handling of the South West African Mandate and for suggesting (in an article entitled "Theft of a Mandate" on 14 September) that the Nationalists had "stolen" extra seats in parliament by including the territory in general elections.⁵⁹ He also criticised it for "giving ammunition to South Africa's enemies" by saying the South West Africa issue was a "burning" one at the time and that it could lead to "awkward" questions at UNO if South Africa became a republic. The timing of the editorials, said Louw, was undoubtedly "also intended to influence the results of the republican referendum". He asked the Times whether an attack such as this on South African government policy by "Britain's leading newspaper" was an attempt to induce Commonwealth members to reject South Africa's future application to continue membership.

The Natal Daily News pointed out, however, that was at issue, and what Louw was choosing to ignore in his flurry of belligerency was the implication of a constitutional change in South Africa

⁵⁸ The Friend, 30 August 1960.

⁵⁹ Natal Daily News, 30 September 1960.

on the international status of South West Africa. The status of the territory could change if South Africa left the Commonwealth and became a republic and this could in itself would provide a "fresh argument" for placing the territory under UN Trusteeship.⁶⁰

Two days before the referendum the British high commission sent to the CRO in London a summarised report, without comment, of one of Verwoerd's last campaigning speeches in which he had said that when the time came South Africa's Commonwealth membership would be discussed in a "good, calm and reasoning manner" because of the need for the Commonwealth "to keep its members together".⁶¹ Verwoerd would "go personally" to put South Africa's case and there was no need to fear "economic reprisals" because of South Africa's strong economic position. There was also no danger of isolation because South Africa had "friends" in the UNO and no need to fear the creation of "Communist Congostans" on her borders.

(c) The referendum results and black opinion

As for the voteless majority, relegated to the role of angry onlookers, the ANC and the Congress Alliance in general set out in vain to try and persuade the white voters to reject the republic. Despite the official stance of rejection of the "fraudulent" nature of a "whites-only" referendum it was decided to try and distribute (illegally, by then, because of the recent bannings of the main liberation movements) pamphlets at public meetings urging whites to "Vote Against A Minority Republic" and declaring that South Africa could not afford to be "side-tracked" from the struggle of the voteless majority for equal rights.⁶² Voters were urged to say "no" to a "Verwoerd Republic" and "yes"

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No. 100A, 3 October 1960.

⁶² AD 2186 (ANC), H(a) (Pamphlets), H(a)13, "Vote Against a Minority Republic", n.d.

to a multi-racial democracy.

On 5 October the referendum was duly fought and won by the Nationalists, but only by a margin of 4% and with one province, Natal, remaining firmly monarchist.⁶³ Natal achieved a two thirds majority in favour of retaining the monarchy by 135,598 votes to 42,299.⁶⁴ The voting figures indicated, to a large extent, the predicted split on language lines between Afrikaans and English. The results were described in a COD pamphlet as "fraudulent" because "Even among the three million Europeans, nearly half are opposed to the Nationalist Party, which got the barest majority" and "who ever heard of a referendum in which four-fifths of the public was debarred from the referendum?"⁶⁵

The campaign had been essentially a dialogue between the white groups and the non-European population had been relegated to the role of interested (or disinterested) spectators.⁶⁶ Indian Opinion⁶⁷ noted after the referendum that the non-Europeans "by and large, are not particularly interested whether South Africa is a republic or a monarchy, nor are they overmuch concerned whether South Africa will remain in the Commonwealth or will be compelled to leave it". But they had looked on "with some interest" at what was primarily a clash between "Boer and Briton" and what appeared to be a "settling of scores" between the two white groups. Whether South Africa remained in the Commonwealth or not, the position of the non-European people would "continue to deteriorate".

The article went on to criticise Britain's historical role in

⁶³ The official results according to Round Table (Vol.51, 1960-61, p.81) were 850458 in favour of a republic and 775878 against.

⁶⁴ Miller, Survey, p.151.

⁶⁵ AD 2186 (ANC), H(a)17, "In defence of South Africa", n.d.

⁶⁶ Miller, Survey, p.151.

⁶⁷ Indian Opinion, 14 October 1960.

South Africa and stated that the non-European population would not "shed a tear" for the loss of the British connection:

On the occasion of this historic decision it might be recalled that it was the Liberal Government of Campbell-Bannerman which in 1910 approved of the Colour-Bar being written into the Constitution of Union, and since then successive Governments under the British Monarchy have supported the suppression of the non-White people by the White people here. So there is no need for any shedding of tears by the non-European for the loss of the British Connection.

The "next question", continued the article, was the attitude of the non-white countries to the continued membership of South Africa in the Commonwealth. It was "almost certain" that Britain...would do everything to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth for there were "vast British commercial and industrial interests in the country". It would "not be surprising" if she succeeded, in spite of Malaya and Ghana, because she could use the "excuse" that if South Africa remains in, the members of the Commonwealth would be able to exercise some influence on her. Ultimately, however, black nationalism in South Africa would "collide with White nationalism" in order to resolve the situation.

The response of the ANC to the result of the referendum was given in its official organ, Congress Voice, in November 1960.⁶⁸ Despite the Nationalist victory in the referendum, the "people had to realise", it said, "that victory over the Nationalist Republic" was a "practical proposition". It asked for a campaign "on all fronts" to unfold so that by the time the republican bill was introduced into parliament, the country would be in "a state of readiness for militant action" in every corner of South Africa. The slogan would be "No Republic without the

⁶⁸ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box H(b) (Publications - periodicals), Congress Voice, November 1960, p.2.

participation of our people", "No taxation without representation", "End all Pass Laws", "Lift the Ban on the ANC and PAC", etc. It asked for the campaign to reach its "highest pitch" between March and 31 May 1961 and ended with the call, "We will not allow a Fascist Republic."

The battle had been lost before it had even begun, however, for disunity within the ranks of the black opposition and the lack of response by anti-republican whites to calls made by extra-parliamentary organisations made any such forceful attempt to stop the republic virtually impossible to achieve in the face of Nationalist determination. The possibility remained, however, that by calling on the Afro-Asian nations to put pressure on the white Commonwealth countries, South Africa might be isolated in the Commonwealth or even expelled at the next prime ministers' conference scheduled for March 1961. The fate of such an appeal will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 19: The 1961 Conference and South Africa's Withdrawal from the Commonwealth

(a) Introduction

Once the referendum was over all eyes were focused on the question of South Africa's future application for membership of the Commonwealth as a republic. Putting aside all regrets at the defeat for the defenders of the monarchy in South Africa, Round Table and many other supporters of the Commonwealth connection now argued that membership of the Commonwealth should be automatic and that, as a republic, South Africa "should command in the Commonwealth as much sympathy and respect as were accorded at their inception to the republics of Ireland and India".¹ If the continued membership were now to be debated it would not be because of the republic itself but because of the "conflict of social principles between South Africa and all the other countries of the Commonwealth".

On 20 November Verwoerd had publicly declared his wish for South Africa to remain in the Commonwealth provided no humiliating conditions were attached, and he had accepted Macmillan's advice to refer the question to a March 1961 meeting of the prime ministers which he had said he himself would attend. The question now was whether the disapproval of some statesmen would go so deep as to make them unable to approve South Africa's membership. Round Table pointed out that if the conference in March were to expel South Africa from the Commonwealth it would not be just the "National Government, or even the white electorate" that would be expelled but the "whole South African nation", of which its ten million disfranchised non-whites were, "in the eyes of the Commonwealth at large..., as fully members as any others". Once the Union was out, the possibility of using Commonwealth influence "to help these" was gone.

¹ Round Table, Vol.51 (1960-61), No.201, December 1960, p.4.

What Round Table was forgetting, however, was the general context of South Africa's weakening Commonwealth ties before the events of 1961. Twelve years of Nationalist rule had seen a whittling away at the symbols of the British connection while the rise of African nationalism inside and outside of South Africa had driven English-speakers closer to the Nationalists on racial and foreign issues. Britain's changing place in the ranks of the world powers had hastened South Africa's exposure to the "harsh winds" of international reprobation.² Without the protective umbrella provided by Britain, increasing isolation for South Africa had resulted from her racial policies which were seen as irreconcilable with modern practices in the old Commonwealth as well as the new. As for the new Commonwealth, while Africa had been too weak to achieve a result at the 1960 conference, the year 1961 would see the situation completely transformed as more African states qualified for membership and South Africa was placed in the position of having to re-apply as a republic for membership.³

As Vale points out, the increase in membership changed the Commonwealth into a "genuinely multi-racial" and "intercontinental" organisation and with it external pressures had mounted on South Africa. More publicity and public concern surrounded prime ministers' meetings and the scrupulous concern of the past for non-interference in members' domestic policies was less important to the African members. Thus the environment at the 1961 meeting was not favourable to South Africa's continued membership in spite of the efforts made by Britain and Australia.⁴ The Africans, on the other hand, were about to win their first major victory in the campaign to isolate South Africa.

At the end of 1960, the British high commissioner in South

² Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.395.

³ Ibid., p.411.

⁴ Ibid., p.412.

Africa, John Maud, reviewed the difficult year for British-South African relations noting that: "Internationally, the Union is the most disliked and reviled country west of the Iron Curtain."⁵ South Africa had invited the opposition of the other members of the Commonwealth to its continued membership and it was easy to argue that "the Commonwealth would be better rid of so disreputable a member". Maud, however, still advised making every effort to keep South Africa in for the sake of keeping "faith" with the loyal whites and the "inarticulate" non-European majority which needed Commonwealth friendship and encouragement and who could "look elsewhere" if abandoned by Britain and the rest.⁶

The British attitude was to be crucial to the question of whether the republic would be in or out of the Commonwealth. Both before and after the referendum this attitude to South Africa was based on a complex series of political, economic, military and cultural considerations. These factors interrelated in such a way as to produce a remarkably consistent overall policy stance that did not change much with successive administrations. By Macmillan's time that policy was firmly grounded on the premise of what later came to be called "Constructive Engagement", or the belief that by constantly encouraging the Nationalist government to remain engaged in dialogue through the medium of organisations such as the Commonwealth, that government would begin to moderate its apartheid policies and would remain within the western sphere of influence.

This had been the approach before the republican referendum and it continued thereafter. It was made necessary by the history of close economic and political ties between the two countries - ties which Britain could not afford to break by antagonising the apartheid government. But it led to a complex and difficult series of diplomatic manoeuvres for Macmillan's government as it

⁵ Ibid., p.413.

⁶ Ibid., p.414.

tried to balance Britain's interests in Africa and Asia with those in South Africa. And, inevitably, as we have seen, it led to the alienation of those in South Africa who counted upon Britain to support their struggle against the minority government.

Towards the end of 1959 British officials in the high commission in Cape Town had drawn up a guidance memorandum on policy towards South Africa that contained a revealing summary of "pros" and "cons" concerning the value to Britain of a continuing Commonwealth relationship with South Africa. The memorandum was entitled "The Union, Asset or Liability to the Commonwealth, What does it cost us?", and it had been prepared initially for the high commissioner, Maud, in anticipation of questions during talks with a party from the Industrial Development Corporation in August 1959.⁷ It was a summary of British assessments of the economic and political value of South Africa's Commonwealth membership. Divided into four columns headed: "What do we gain?", "What does it cost us?", "What do we lose by a break?" and "What do we gain by a break?", it analysed the British-South African relationship in categories of trade, finance, defence and general factors. The overall picture was one of important financial and trading losses that could be incurred if South Africa were to leave the Commonwealth, although in defence and foreign affairs the losses were compensated to some extent by the advantage of being rid of a cause of "embarrassment" in UNO.

It was noted that Britain would lose "an established link with a potential friend" and would be "deserting the English-speaking South Africans". It could also mean "the first step in the break-up of the Commonwealth". Concerning the high commission territories, the memorandum noted that Britain would lose "freedom of access" and that there could be a loss of trade for

⁷ PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.10, Brief on forthcoming visit of Prime Minister to South Africa, Memorandum for High Commissioner, "The Union, Asset or Liability to the Commonwealth, What does it cost us?", August 1959.

the territories. "

A summary under the same headings followed for South Africa's gains and losses which stated that for trade and finance, South Africa would gain freedom from imperial preference (enabling her to "horse trade on the world market"), and freedom from sterling if she "chose". On defence, South Africa would lose a "flow of information" and "special treatment" over weapons development and might have to choose a "less welcome partner". On the other hand South Africa would gain independence in defence matters. On foreign affairs she would lose her "last outpost of support in UNO", sources of information and the Commonwealth prime ministers' forum but would gain freedom to follow her ambitions and to "hit back" at her detractors and opponents without reference to the rules. As far as the territories were concerned, South Africa would lose British co-operation and possibly some trade whereas she would gain "a better position to get a stranglehold".

As far as economic advantages for South Africa of leaving the Commonwealth were concerned, the British memorandum had touched upon a factor which was not often stated publicly by South African officials and ministers but which was nonetheless something of an potential inducement to cut Commonwealth links or to be less concerned about breaking these links than might otherwise have been the case. The UP parliamentary opposition might harp upon the economic disasters that could follow the withdrawal of Commonwealth preferential tariffs or the termination of sterling area co-operation but the other side of the argument was the potential expansion of South African export markets, the greater freedom of choice concerning imports and sources of capital, as well as the greater freedom which governments would gain to protect and promote strategic military and industrial sectors of the economy. It would facilitate what one commentator has called the "reorientation of foreign relations away from metropolises [Britain] and towards neighbours

[the protectorates and the sub-saharan region as a whole]"⁸. In other words, the potential for South African capitalist expansion and hegemony in the southern African region would be greatly enhanced. In a similar way, opportunities for the Nationalist government to act more aggressively in the political field in the context of regional coercion and control (as B.J. Vorster's "Outward Policy soon demonstrated), would be expanded."⁹

It was with these and other considerations in mind that Macmillan's government had approached the discussions in May of 1960 and the question of Commonwealth membership for South Africa as a republic after the October referendum. At all times Macmillan's policy was informed by the overriding concern to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth. That much is certain from his memoirs and from much of the commentary on the course of events which has emerged since 1961. Ultimately, however, when faced with the possibility of a split in the Commonwealth, he was to jettison South Africa. British interests in Asia and Africa as well as considerations of national prestige demanded that the Commonwealth be maintained intact, despite the loss of such an important member as South Africa. At the same time, however, the loss was to be cushioned by the negotiation of agreements in the economic, defence, financial and immigration fields, agreements which were seen by both governments as mutually beneficial but which were hotly criticised by South Africa's non-white majority and left-wing opinion overseas.

There seems to be a consensus of opinion that Verwoerd was genuine in his commitment to try and keep South Africa in the Commonwealth although there were some, like the opposition leader, De Villiers Graaff, who claimed immediately after the

⁸ M.M. Sejanamane and T.M Shaw, "Continuing Crisis: Regional Coercion, Co-operation and Contradiction in Southern Africa", in Z.A. Konczacki, J.L. Parpart and T.M. Shaw (eds), Studies in the Economic History of Southern Africa, Vol.II, South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, p. 261.

⁹ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp. 423-425.

withdrawal that Verwoerd had "gambled recklessly" with South Africa's Commonwealth membership.¹⁰

J.D.B. Miller believes that Verwoerd was sincere about wanting South Africa to stay in the Commonwealth after becoming a republic and that his approach both before and after the referendum was "consistent".¹¹ This view is supported by writers such as Geysler and Geldenhuys. The recent commentaries by J.R.T. Wood, Peter Lyon and others, while not disputing the motivation of Verwoerd, reserve an opinion on the question as to whether he was ultimately responsible or not for the withdrawal because of his intransigence. What is clear from all accounts is that Verwoerd was at all times aware that his domestic policies would cause a reaction at the conference and that if there were to be a case of "unacceptable interference" in South Africa's affairs, he would value South Africa's sovereignty and honour above Commonwealth membership. His statements and attitude after the conference seem to confirm this view and to cast doubt on the depth of his commitment to Commonwealth membership. After all, the whole political and ideological background of Verwoerd's career had been anti-British and anti-Commonwealth. He had only aligned himself with the idea of a republic inside the Commonwealth, "almost against his better judgment",¹² because of the practicalities of the situation and the realisation that leaving the Commonwealth would not be acceptable to a large part of the population.

As for the attitudes of the other prime ministers at the 1961 conference, much has been said about the roles of Diefenbaker as opponent of South Africa, Menzies as the only "friend" of Verwoerd and the "implacable" Afro-Asians: Nkrumah, Balewa (of Nigeria), the Tunku (of Malaya), Bandaranaike (of Ceylon), Khan (of Pakistan) and Nehru. The roles of the Afro-Asians and

¹⁰ Round Table, Vol.51, No.203, June 1961, p.238.

¹¹ Miller, Survey, pp.150-151.

¹² Geysler, Watershed, p.98.

Diefenbaker, in particular, have been heavily emphasised, in a negative manner, by South African Nationalist opinion.¹³ Non-white opinion, on the other hand, highlighted the roles of Nehru and Nkrumah as the prime movers in getting the hated regime "expelled" from the conference. Macmillan blamed Verwoerd, the Afro-Asians and Diefenbaker in that order, and regarded Menzies as a staunch ally.¹⁴ There have been reassessments of these portrayals in recent years and, in particular, that of J R.T. Wood, whose article has thrown some extra light on the roles of the three important personalities, Verwoerd, Macmillan and Diefenbaker.¹⁵

It is necessary to look in greater detail at the developments after the referendum and the events of the conference itself in order to obtain a clearer perspective on the aims and motives of the principal players and of the causes of South Africa's withdrawal. Wood's account, supplemented by the accounts of other historians, press reports and Macmillan's memoirs would offer a picture which, while confirming the view held by most commentators that South Africa's policies made it impossible for that country's Commonwealth membership to continue, also makes it clear that her withdrawal was by no means inevitable and was not expected by virtually anyone before and during the conference. Only Verwoerd and Louw seemed to have been prepared for that eventuality.

(b) Pre-conference opinion: The debate inside South Africa.

During debate on the Republic of South Africa Amendment bill in

¹³ D.W. Krüger, for example, says that Verwoerd's application for membership was "...opposed by the Afro-Asian members, supported by the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr John Diefenbaker" and his decision to withdraw was greeted "with relish" by the Afro-Asian group and by the "gleeful Diefenbaker" (Making of a Nation, pp.334-335).

¹⁴ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.290-305.

¹⁵ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", pp.161-178.

January and February of 1961, De Villiers Graaff and Steytler had tried to introduce amendments to the bill that would, in the eyes of their respective parties, have guaranteed Commonwealth membership after becoming a republic. The amendments included (from the Progressive Party side) reforms such as broadening the franchise and postponing the republic until a better climate was in place for making a Commonwealth membership application. But Verwoerd dismissed them out of hand as attempts to stop the introduction of the republic by "making demands which they know to be impossible".¹⁶

He said the government's mandate had been that "South Africa, when it becomes a republic, wants to remain a member of the Commonwealth". He would do his "best" to achieve that and if he succeeded he would ensure South Africa remained in the Commonwealth "as long as the Commonwealth remains what it is". If it tried to interfere in internal affairs of member states then South Africa would not remain.¹⁷ But, he went on, if the Commonwealth refused membership to South Africa or stated membership would be granted subject to "humiliating conditions" then South Africa would become a republic outside the Commonwealth.

During the second reading debate he said that in the past the Nationalists had not recognised Commonwealth membership as one of the "characteristics of a Republic of South Africa".¹⁸ But "recently" it had been realised by them that just as the republic was "deeply engraved" in the hearts of the Afrikaans people, so was Commonwealth membership "deeply engraved" in the hearts of the English-speaking community. The Afrikaners did not come to that realisation out of any concern for the "material" benefits of Commonwealth membership, which were in any case "not as great as some people would profess" but more out of a desire to assist

¹⁶ House of Assembly Debates, col.25, 23 January 1961.

¹⁷ Ibid., col.25, 23 January 1961.

¹⁸ Ibid., col.327, 23 January 1961.

in "welding us together into one nation in the new republic".¹⁹

He then went on to appeal for unity in the new republic and suggested that he might take English speakers into the Cabinet if they were to join the National Party as a demonstration of national unity.²⁰ De Villiers Graaff's answer to Verwoerd concentrated mainly on the Commonwealth membership question and on the lack of guarantees that the republic would be in the Commonwealth. He also attacked Verwoerd's intimation that Commonwealth membership was one of the "sacrifices" made by the Nationalists in order to achieve their republic, noting that this made the opposition even more wary of the sincerity of the government in its desire to remain in.²¹

He also questioned Verwoerd's statement that he could not give guarantees concerning Commonwealth membership because it would give other countries the right of veto over South Africa and the right to interfere in South Africa's affairs. This he should have thought of before he introduced legislation for the republic, said De Villiers Graaff. What was more important to Verwoerd, the advantages of Commonwealth membership or the introduction of a republic "for sentimental reasons?", he asked.²²

De Villiers Graaff stressed, further, the opposition of the coloured population to any attempt to withdraw from the Commonwealth and was supported by one of the coloured people's representatives, A. Bloomberg, who remarked that the government, by excluding the coloureds and "11 million non-whites" from the referendum vote, had demonstrated to the outside world "it had no intention whatsoever of paying any heed to the wishes of the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., col.332, 30 January 1961.

²¹ House of Assembly Debates, col.352, 30 January 1961.

²² Ibid., col.353, 30 January 1961.

non-Whites".²³

Verwoerd replied that he believed "common sense" would triumph at the conference (in March) and that South Africa would remain a member. He would do all that he could short of compromising his principles and "only prejudice and unjustifiable interference" would keep South Africa out.²⁴ As for the coloureds, he said that if he had allowed them to vote it would not have made much difference to the voting figures and in any case they were more concerned with "bread and butter" issues than a republic.²⁵ He had made it clear from the beginning it would be a whites-only decision as the whole issue was between English and Afrikaans South Africans anyway. It would be a mistake to bring in the non-whites as "arbiters" on the issue.²⁶

A somewhat fiery speech by the UP member for South Coast, Douglas Mitchell, was reported in February in which Mitchell tried to make a "last ditch stand" for Natal over the republic. He had said that Natal would "refuse to accept" the republic.²⁷ Natal would be compelled to obey the new constitution, he had said, but "we shall seek the first opportunity to make our own laws". From then on Natal would consider that it was being ruled by force and without its consent: "I can speak for Natal and say that we have got political unity in the province such as we have not enjoyed for 25 years". But the time had come when Natal had to say it would not accept the republic and was not willing to assist in bringing it into being.

De Villiers Graaff had been questioned by Die Transvaler

²³ Ibid., col.28, 23 January 1961.

²⁴ Ibid., cols.1039-1040, 9 February 1961.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., col.1041, 9 February 1961.

²⁷ Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No. 4, 17 February 1961, p.7.

concerning these remarks and was reported to have said he understood the Natal desire to bring about amendments to the constitution that would contribute to "real unity" in South Africa although he admitted that once the republic had been brought about it could not be undone.²⁸ Mitchell's statements were further repudiated by the Rand Daily Mail and by three Progressive Party MPs who described them as "fatuous and melodramatic".²⁹

The position of the UP over the republic and Commonwealth membership was seen, by some, to be rather weak and based, ironically, largely on the premise that Verwoerd would be proved wrong at the conference. This was pointed out in an article in the East London Daily Despatch in early February. The Daily Despatch said that success for Verwoerd at the conference could "seal the fate of the UP" because the Commonwealth issue was "De Villiers Graaff's only platform".³⁰ The "irony" was that the United Party, which fought so vigorously against the establishment of the republic could only benefit from a decision to exclude South Africa from the Commonwealth. Despite the "efforts of Macmillan and Sandys", membership was not yet assured and the UP could claim "with some justification" that if it were the government, better terms could be obtained for South Africa. However, if South Africa were accepted at the conference the UP would be left without "a vote-catching slogan". Many of its supporters would then defect to the Nationalists.

Speaking on behalf of the voteless majority (but not necessarily the ANC),³¹ Indian Opinion, on the other hand, was predicting

²⁸ Ibid., pp.7-8.

²⁹ Reported in "Press Comment, Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No. 4, 17 February 1961, p.14.

³⁰ East London Daily Despatch, 7 February 1961.

³¹ Indian Opinion was regarded as being in reactionary, "bourgeois" hands by Brian Bunting, author of an article in New Age, the COD journal. (See Part 3, The Strijdom Years, chapter 12, p.281, n.37).

that the decision as to whether or not South Africa would be readmitted would depend "more on economic considerations than on principles of equity".³² The "immense British investments" in South Africa would make sure the British tried to persuade the others to allow South Africa to stay. Afro-Asian prime ministers did not seem to be committing themselves which "shows they might not object to Verwoerd's racial republic remaining in the Commonwealth".

The British reason for trying to keep South Africa in, continued Indian Opinion, was that leaving the Commonwealth would hurt the non-whites more than the whites, but, "whatever their reasons", it was clear that non-Europeans had "always suffered in South Africa even while in the Commonwealth and Britain has not been able to do anything". Verwoerd was going to the conference in a defiant mood and not "as a supplicant" and would only stay on his terms. The other prime ministers would not be able to move Verwoerd "one iota" from his course and only economic measures in the form of loss of preferences would "succeed where principles failed". In that case the public would rather be told that it was out of concern for the "profits of British and other investors" in South Africa rather than concern for the non-whites that motivated the efforts to keep South Africa in.

This, then, was the state of opinion in South Africa before the conference began. While it is probably true to say that most white South Africans hoped that South Africa would be allowed to stay in the Commonwealth without too many conditions being attached to that membership,³³ the attitude of non-whites would have been almost directly opposite. The banned ANC and its Congress Alliance associates called for the expulsion of the

³² Indian Opinion, 3 March 1961.

³³ The Cape Times of 10 February 1961 had stated that it agreed with Verwoerd that South Africa could not accept any sort of "probationary" membership of the Commonwealth because if it were accepted it would mean the Commonwealth prime ministers' conference had "taken over supervision of the political morals of member states".

republic from the Commonwealth and at the same time embarked on a campaign to oppose the introduction of the "racist republic". Noting that years of Commonwealth membership had not mitigated the suffering of the majority to any extent, on the eve of the conference Albert Luthuli appealed for expulsion to mark international disavowal of the apartheid "mania".³⁴ As for the PAC, it declared itself to be unambiguously opposed to South Africa's membership and declared satisfaction after the conference that she had been forced out.³⁵ At the same time the PAC opposed the ANC call for a general strike against the introduction of the republic in May 1961, arguing that the change from a monarchical to a republican constitution was irrelevant to the sufferings of the black majority.

(c) The economic debate

A large part of the debate between government and opposition in South Africa on the Commonwealth connection and the republican application centred on the possible economic consequences of South Africa having to leave the Commonwealth. The United Party had a vested interest politically in claiming there would be a serious possible losses, while the Nationalists were concerned to show that there would be a minimum of damage. The political implications had been particularly important before the referendum and the British government had tried, not very successfully, to avoid damaging the United Party's anti-republican campaign by ordering British officials not to make statements implying that economic relations would remain the same whether South Africa stayed in or departed from the Commonwealth.³⁶

The Nationalists, after the republican victory, could claim with

³⁴ Reported in The Daily Worker (London), 9 March 1961.

³⁵ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box H(b) Publications - periodicals, No.17, "Mafube", May 1961.

³⁶ See pp.335-339.

greater confidence that there would be little change to the economic relationship because, they argued, Britain would not throw away such a valuable trading relationship. In any case, the economic preferences were bilateral agreements outside the Commonwealth ambit and could be continued if both sides were willing. There were the precedents of Burma and Ireland to support their point of view.³⁷

During the budget debate on 15 March when the final decision on membership had not yet been communicated to parliament, the minister of finance, T.E. Dönges, noted that he had drafted the budget on two assumptions: that South Africa would remain in the Commonwealth and that even if she were to be expelled it would not necessitate the estimates having to be changed.³⁸

He quoted the brother of the leader of the opposition, the economist Jan Graaff, who had said that the economic consequences of severing the Commonwealth relationship would be "none at all" and he argued that trade preferences were bilateral agreements which the United Kingdom was unlikely to cancel. It had not done so in the cases of Ireland and Burma and such agreements were "not in conflict with GATT". Similarly, membership of the sterling area was not dependent on Commonwealth membership as countries such as Ireland were still members while Canada was a member of the Commonwealth but not of the sterling area. The capital flows from the United Kingdom to South Africa could continue unhindered or those more recently from South Africa to Britain.

Opponents of the Nationalist view argued that the preferences would not automatically be extended after withdrawal. Sir Arnold Plant, professor of commerce at the London School of Economics, had said in 1960 that there would be great resistance from GATT to Britain extending preferences to a non-Commonwealth country

³⁷ House of Assembly Debates, col.1188, 13 February 1961.

³⁸ Ibid., col.2998, 15 March 1961.

(in the event of South Africa leaving) and would probably refuse to allow it.³⁹ Commonwealth preferences were acceptable to GATT but the extension of preferences to countries outside the system was outlawed unless this measure led to the creation of a customs union.

Round Table argued that although South Africa would remain in the sterling area she would "no longer participate in its loose system of management that was confined to the Commonwealth members of the Area". She would lose her "privileged access" to the London capital market which still provided a high proportion of South Africa's development capital. She "might forfeit her imperial preferences", and although the value of these preferences had declined since the 1930's half of South Africa's commodity exports still went to Commonwealth countries and she received preferences in some of them. Almost one third of her exports went to the United Kingdom which gave her preferences averaging almost 10% over non-Commonwealth competitors in a wide range of commodities including fresh and tinned fruit, fish and wattle products, maize, "kaffir corn" and asbestos. It was estimated that those preferences applied to about 60% of her exports to the UK or 20% of her total commodity exports. "These are facts that even a Nationalist Government cannot afford to ignore".⁴⁰

The Nationalists claimed, however, that preferences were more valuable to the British than to South Africa and that in any case they were declining in importance and that South Africa could not base her economy on them. Verwoerd had said that he was determined to diversify South Africa's export markets and that trade missions would be sent out to Europe, the Far East and the Americas.⁴¹

³⁹ Pretoria News, 5 August 1960.

⁴⁰ Round Table, Vol.51, No.197., August 1960, p.369.

⁴¹ Quoted in Geyser, Watershed, p.73.

The British view of the value of preferences and other economic connections was given in the memorandum of 1959 in preparation for Macmillan's visit.⁴² On trade, for example, it gave figures for British, Commonwealth and world exports and imports to and from South Africa and noted that imperial preference was worth "about £2m annually to Britain (on £187m of total British exports to South Africa). Under the heading: "What does it cost us?", it noted that imperial preference cost Britain an "occasional conflict of choice over buying their [South African] goods or other Commonwealth goods". Britain gave imperial preference of £6m annually on South African imports of £106m, which included a subsidy on sugar worth £2.5m. What would affect Britain were there to be a break with South Africa would be South Africa possibly turning to foreign suppliers, because there was "little trade sentiment" left. But there remained the "strong bait" of preferences on wine, fruits and sugar and without these there would be the urge to sell Britain less "and selling elsewhere leads to buying elsewhere". What would be gained from a break would be "freedom of movement on wine" and "no worry about a contracted supplier".

On "finance", however, the costs for Britain of a break were seen to be much higher because of the danger of a possible "nationalisation" of Britain's substantial investments in South Africa, as well as the weakening of the sterling area if South Africa were to leave. Britain had £900m invested in South Africa of which £600m was "private". London handled all of South Africa's gold sales which gave Britain a "useful commission". Britain maintained a close liaison with the South African central bank and South Africa's gold was a "source of strength" to the sterling area. Also, South Africa maintained a favourable balance of trade with the non-sterling area that helped the general balance of trade of the sterling area as a whole. On the other hand, British investment in South Africa was to a certain extent

⁴² PRO, DO 119, File 1206, No.10, Brief on Macmillan's visit, "The Union, Asset or Liability to the Commonwealth: What does it cost us?", Memorandum for the High Commissioner, August 1959.

"at the expense" of other Commonwealth areas, particularly when it concerned "official loans". As for semi-official loans, the memorandum noted that South Africa, drew £1m more out the Commonwealth Development Finance Corporation than she put in.

In the immediate aftermath of withdrawal from the Commonwealth the economic debate grew more urgent as it had not yet become clear whether Britain would sign new agreements with South Africa on preference and other matters. On 22 March Helen Suzman for the Progressives brought up the question of economic uncertainty in the context of the Railways and Harbours vote, pointing out that no one could predict what "pressure is going to be brought to bear on Britain by other Commonwealth countries with whom we compete for markets".⁴³ Fifty percent of South Africa's exports went to the Commonwealth, she argued, yet no one could know what the future of South Africa's trade relations would be after the withdrawal. Boycotts in Africa and elsewhere were mounting and no longer could the loophole label of "Product of the Commonwealth" be used to disguise South Africa's manufactures.

The Nationalist member for Paarl, W.C. Malan, then criticised the opposition for harping on the value of preferences in the United Kingdom for deciduous fruit, some 65% of which was sent to that country, and suggested instead that more effort should be made to break away from the "colonial mentality" concerning exports to Britain and that markets in Europe should be developed as an alternative.⁴⁴

The minister for economic affairs, Dr N. Diederichs, came into the debate on 27 March to rebut opposition accusations of economic damage as a result of withdrawal and stressed again the contractual and bilateral nature of preferences not only with Britain but with other countries like Canada.⁴⁵ In respect of the

⁴³ House of Assembly Debates, col.3415, 22 March 1961.

⁴⁴ Ibid., col.3459, 22 March 1961.

⁴⁵ Ibid., col.3723-3725, 27 March 1961.

latter he quoted his Canadian counterpart who had said that Canadian-South African preferences dated from the Ottawa agreements of 1932 and were terminable with 6 months notice by either party but that Canada "sells more goods to South Africa than we buy from them".⁴⁶ The time was "not too far distant", he predicted, when Britain would be forced to abandon preferences altogether as a result of pressure from the European Economic Community or GATT.

The Financial Times of London had virtually confirmed the Nationalist argument on 16 March, the day of South Africa's withdrawal, when it said preferences and bilateral ties would continue.⁴⁷ The precedents of Ireland and Burma would hold and Whitehall was "determined to restrict any other effects of the break" and assumed that present arrangements would continue. The reason was that "English South Africans had to have continued access" economically and that also the protectorates could not be lost. Just less than one third of South Africa's exports and just under one quarter of its imports were to and from Britain in 1959. 50.6% of her exports went to the Commonwealth as a whole and 46.6% of her imports were supplied by those countries. Although some countries might break bilateral economic ties the volume of trade was "so small" in those cases that it was not important.

As we shall see, these assessments proved to be completely accurate for after a brief period of uncertainty the British government embarked on a policy of maintaining its economic ties with South Africa virtually unchanged, ignoring criticisms from the Labour opposition and anti-apartheid forces that it was nullifying all the effects of South Africa's exclusion from the Commonwealth.

The debate between government and opposition in South Africa over

⁴⁶ Ibid., col.3723, 27 March 1961.

⁴⁷ Financial Times, 16 March, 1961.

the economic effects of South Africa's withdrawal had been further contextualised by the British moves to join the EEC in the late 1950's and by the establishment of the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) by Britain and the Scandinavian countries in 1959.⁴⁸ South Africa approached the formation of the EEC with a British perspective because of her close ties with Britain economically and tended to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude concerning British negotiations after 1957.⁴⁹ This did not stop her, together with other Commonwealth countries, from expressing great concern over the possible effects on imperial preference and access of agricultural goods in particular to the British market, which the EEC's general tariff would have. In 1957 Eric Louw represented South Africa at the special Commonwealth economic conference in July 1957, and joined the other Commonwealth countries in expressing unanimous concern that if Britain joined EEC the Commonwealth preferences would lapse and adversely affect their agricultural products' access to that country.⁵⁰ For its part the British government was reluctant to inform the others of the progress and aims of negotiations with the EEC and remained unsure whether to commit Britain wholeheartedly to the EEC, preferring initially to set up a free trade area rather than a political and economic union. This uncertainty had an adverse effect both on Britain and on the Commonwealth's confidence in her and in 1961 Edward Heath's secret discussions with the council of ministers where he presented his application for Britain amplified this distrust.

Commonwealth pressure led Britain to place more value on the Commonwealth preferences than on the European market at first but the Six claimed the effects of an enlarged European market would benefit Commonwealth producers. However, South Africa shared the

⁴⁸ P. Kapp, "Suid-Afrika en die Ontstaan van die Europese Ekonomiese Gemeenskap", Historia, Vol.37, No.2., November 1992, pp.86-97.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.87-88.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.88.

fears of the others that the general tariff would shut out important sugar (80% tariff), fruit, wine and canned vegetables and grapes, and all processed products in particular. Other agricultural products were unprocessed and therefore free of duty. Minerals and ores were only subject to a 3% tariff and were therefore not affected to the same degree. Manufactured goods which were not a major part of her exports also had high tariffs applied to them. Nevertheless the wine and sugar industries approached the problem seriously after 1961 noting there was a 12-year adjustment clause during which the external tariff would be applied in stages.⁵¹

After 1958 Britain realised the EEC would not compromise on its aims and that attempts to persuade the Six to adopt a free trade area rather than a customs union (with external tariff) had failed. So she negotiated with the Scandinavian countries to set up EFTA⁵² which allowed 90% of Commonwealth preferences to remain and did not have a general external tariff. Agricultural products were cut out of the Stockholm agreement. Nevertheless in practice Commonwealth countries had to share the preferential access to Britain now with Scandinavian countries and were not entitled to the same in Scandinavia. It affected South Africa's wattle and box-wood exports in particular.⁵³

But Britain realised the EFTA experiment had failed as the EEC continued to grow at a faster rate than the EFTA economies and so began again to negotiate for admission to the EEC. This provided the context to the uncertainties experienced by many Commonwealth countries about the future of the Commonwealth preferences. In South Africa the possibility of withdrawal from the Commonwealth was to provide something of an incentive to the government and many industries most likely to be affected by the loss of preferences to start searching for alternative markets.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.89.

⁵² Ibid., p.90.

⁵³ Ibid., p.90.

The diversification of South Africa's import and export markets had been an aspect of Nationalist policy for years prior to withdrawal.

(d) The withdrawal conference

Between October 1960 and March 1961 a flurry of background diplomacy conducted by Macmillan and Menzies seemed to have resulted in a situation which, in the eyes of Macmillan and many others, guaranteed South Africa's future membership of the Commonwealth.⁵⁴ Verwoerd had indicated to Macmillan that he would attend the prime ministers' conference in March and that he would not dispute the membership of Cyprus if criticised by the others. He would not, however, "bargain" over Commonwealth membership by succumbing to pressure to adopt reformist policies at home. Diefenbaker, although displaying a "holier-than thou" attitude (according to Macmillan) had been asked not to take a position before the conference began.⁵⁵ Nkrumah and the Tunku had indicated they would not force the issue.⁵⁶ Menzies remained Macmillan's "and indeed, South Africa's, steadiest ally". He had agreed before the 1961 conference to persuade New Zealand and Canada to avoid a crisis.⁵⁷

Macmillan and Menzies wanted to establish the convention that constitutional changes were a "domestic matter" that would lead, as for South Africa's case, to "automatic renewal".⁵⁸ Subsequently when Macmillan and Menzies put the idea to Verwoerd, he agreed. Macmillan then appealed to Nehru for restraint and was pleased with the response. Indian Opinion reported on 25 November

⁵⁴ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.297.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.295.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.293.

⁵⁷ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.164.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.165.

1960 that opinion in New Delhi was inclined to the view that

any expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth might close what is, perhaps, the most effective political channel left through which South Africa can be reached and influenced and would render untenable the British position in the Protectorates of Basutoland and Swaziland and perhaps even Bechuanaland. It would add to the isolation of the African people in South Africa and might affect the nature and purpose of the Commonwealth.⁵⁹

To Macmillan, then, South Africa's membership seemed assured by the end of 1960.⁶⁰ He stated in his memoirs that he had all along been determined to "make every effort to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth".⁶¹ It was "unfair" use of the procedural point to refuse republican membership on the basis of domestic policy and South Africa would not change anyway. If others felt it necessary to expel South Africa for this it should be at a special meeting with "due solemnity". By keeping South Africa in, pressure could be put on her to change. Any "trivial" concession from Verwoerd, Macmillan said, would have been accepted with relief.⁶² Verwoerd, however, had made it clear he was not going to change his policies to suit the Commonwealth and had already told Macmillan as much in the letter of 24 October.⁶³

J.D.B. Miller's account of the 1961 conference begins with Verwoerd's parting message when he left for London, saying that he would not allow his feelings towards Britain and the British

⁵⁹ Indian Opinion, 25 November 1960.

⁶⁰ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.165.

⁶¹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.292.

⁶² Ibid., p.297.

⁶³ Ibid., p.291.

people to be influenced by "groups consisting of ignorant persons and inexperienced fanatics" (referring to the British demonstrators against apartheid).⁶⁴ But, as Miller points out, the antagonism towards South Africa was not just confined to the young, the fanatical and those on the extreme left of the political spectrum in Britain. There was a

broad band of feeling...which rejected the idea of continued connection with South Africa, for what were considered to be good and sufficient British reasons - those associated with a liberal political system, a rejection of colour bars, and a conviction that the Commonwealth would work better without South Africa.⁶⁵

Even conservative newspapers such as the Times and Economist were also calling South Africa's continued partnership with the rest of the Commonwealth "a gross anomaly" or an "implacable contradiction".⁶⁶ The Labour Party and trade union movement was declaring in favour of expulsion⁶⁷ unless Verwoerd committed himself to the abandonment of apartheid, and had organised massive protest rallies to greet Verwoerd on his arrival in London.

For British policy-makers it seemed, before the conference began, that British policy in Africa hung "in the balance" between success and failure. South Africa's failure to change its racial policies was the most severe obstacle to success.⁶⁸ In direct contrast to the difficulties in southern and central Africa was the success of the queen's visit to India in early March. It had

⁶⁴ Miller, Survey, p.152.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Daily Telegraph, 6 March 1961.

⁶⁸ Miller, Survey, p.153.

symbolised the smoothness of post-independence relations with India and the fact that much of this was owed to India's remaining within the Commonwealth.

It was hoped that relations with Nigeria, the biggest of Britain's African colonies, would be just as smooth. Nigeria had just gained independence and would be represented for the first time at a Commonwealth conference, while Sierra Leone and Tanganyika were on the verge of attaining independence as well. On the other hand, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was in a critical phase after the Monckton report had intimated the possibility of a break-up. Nevertheless there was some confidence that constitutional advance there would continue.

This was the problem facing Macmillan and Sandys before the conference began. Both wanted South Africa in the Commonwealth and both were committed to rapid advance in Africa and the enlargement of the Commonwealth by African members. They were also aware of the anti-apartheid feelings in Britain and while they themselves rejected apartheid, they knew of the "close connections between the British and South African economies".⁶⁹ What line, asks Miller, were the British to take?

Miller concludes that the British line was to condemn apartheid forcefully so as to win the support of the other prime ministers and then to persuade them to retain South Africa in the Commonwealth.⁷⁰ The constitutional issue would be disposed of first and then there would be debate on South Africa's policies. This tactic would depend on the others' willingness to realise that using South Africa's racial policies as a reason to force her out would expose themselves to the same possible situation perhaps for other reasons in future. "The principle of domestic jurisdiction could be sustained if members were convinced of the dangers to themselves of its being breached in South Africa's

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.154.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

case."⁷¹

It seemed, before the conference (which began on 8 March), that the plan might succeed because none of the prime ministers had committed themselves to South Africa's expulsion.⁷² Nehru, however, had made some ambiguous remarks on his arrival in London which may have been construed as opposition to South Africa's continued membership. On 5 March Nehru was reported to have said "We are not going to put up with this racial discrimination in any shape or form."⁷³ It was also reported that Diefenbaker had denied he would seek a head-on collision with Verwoerd while the Tunku of Malaysia "seemed to hint at delay" and thought South Africa should first become a republic and then "let's see".⁷⁴

The South African press was generally confident about the chances of membership being accepted and even the English-opposition newspapers were prepared to "wish Verwoerd well" at the conference. The Rand Daily Mail on 2 March said that, thanks to Macmillan, there was an 85% chance of South Africa staying in and that it was up to Verwoerd to look after the other 15%.⁷⁵ The blame would be "uniquely his" if he failed because "he exposed us to the risk of expulsion in the first place". The Star said on 6 March that Verwoerd would "find it hard to avoid defending apartheid", but that he had the government and the UP opposition "behind him" in his mission.⁷⁶ Die Transvaler claimed on 9 March that "South Africa will stay in the Commonwealth" and said that Nigeria and Canada were "against attempts to kick South Africa

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p.155.

⁷³ The Sunday Express (London), 5 March 1961.

⁷⁴ The Observer, 5 March 1961.

⁷⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 2 March 1961.

⁷⁶ The Star, 2 March 1961.

out".⁷⁷

During the conference the British press commented extensively on developments. It is worth looking in some detail at the day-by-day commentary in the press because of the accusation by Macmillan (and the South Africans) that the attitude of the British press had contributed to the failure of the conference to keep South Africa in.⁷⁸ If one examines the overall commentary one cannot fail to be struck by the diversity of opinions expressed in the leading British dailies and on the substantially accurate predictions and reports of what was happening. There was also a clear division between those who wanted South Africa out (the socialist Daily Worker, the Labour supporting Guardian and others on the left or liberal side of the spectrum such as the Reynold News) and those on the conservative side, led by the Times, the Telegraph, the Daily Express or the more independent papers such as the Observer, who wanted South Africa in. Providing an interesting position in favour of expulsion, but from the Irish perspective, was the Irish Times, which also made some pointed comparisons with what had happened to Ireland in 1948.

What Macmillan and other critics of the press coverage of the conference ignored was that the climate of public opinion in Britain by 1961 was decidedly anti-South African. (This was despite efforts by Piet Meiring's department of information to counter Verwoerd's negative image by taking out full-page advertisements in favour of South Africa just before the conference began).⁷⁹ The British press, with a few exceptions, reflected the anti-South African mood and expressed the outrage that many felt about the South African government's often-stated refusal to adopt any changes to apartheid. Fresh in many memories was the May 1960 conference and Eric Louw's abrasive attitude.

⁷⁷ Die Transvaler, 9 March 1961.

⁷⁸ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.298.

⁷⁹ Piet Meiring, Inside Information, p.163.

Sharpeville, the state of emergency with its mass arrests and bannings and South African actions in South West Africa were all relatively recent events that continued to attract attention. It was not surprising that the liberal press should have demanded conditions on South Africa's membership of the Commonwealth and that a certain amount of "egging on" or encouragement of the Afro-Asian leaders should have taken place during the conference.

The anti-apartheid movement was growing and had powerful support in the form of the Labour Party and Trade Union movement and all were calling for expulsion. Furthermore, they were assisted by a group of South African exiles in London called the South African United Front and under the leadership of Yusuf Dadoo and Oliver Tambo who played an important role in lobbying the press and the delegates to the conference for South Africa's expulsion.⁸⁰ A climate of opinion was being created that, to a certain extent, the press reflected and which may have influenced some of the prime ministers to oppose South Africa more forcefully. For example Nyerere's threat not to take up Commonwealth membership for Tanganyika was published in the Observer on 12 March, the day before the conference talks on South Africa began, and it reportedly influenced Nkrumah's attitude.⁸¹

Some of the varied comments in the British (and Irish) press just before the conference began are worth looking at more closely. The Irish Times reported on 4 March that South Africa was interested in the Irish case and what had happened after Ireland left in 1948. It noted the "ironic fact" that Malan was the only Commonwealth prime minister to have queried the Ireland Act and to have insisted that it should be a unique arrangement.⁸² He

⁸⁰ Indian Opinion, 31 March 1961.

⁸¹ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", pp.175-6 and Miller, Survey, p.155.

⁸² Irish Times, 4 March 1961.

"may have had Natal in mind as a potential Ulster". It was clear that South Africa's case would dominate the conference and that the British hoped it would be a routine affair. It also reported that relations between the prime ministers was likely to be a "prickly affair" and that Diefenbaker of Canada had cancelled his booking at the Dorchester Hotel and had booked in at the Claridges instead because of Verwoerd.

On 6 March the same newspaper said that "every diminution of the Commonwealth is...inevitably ...a diminution of Britain's new and vulnerable status as a second rate power".⁸³ It said that Britain was resigned to the Commonwealth becoming a mini-UNO and that dominions saw the Commonwealth as more real because of employment and historical links. As for the non-whites, they saw it as a "type of super-welfare institution".

The Daily Herald argued that the Commonwealth could not survive racism and so South Africa was a "menace" and a "liability".⁸⁴ It urged the Commonwealth to draft a set of principles and to leave South Africa to "make the grade or not".

The London Times⁸⁵ argued that the "blossoming" multi-racial club which the Commonwealth was becoming might make the case against South African membership "strong" but that the "voiceless" majority had to be encouraged in South Africa by keeping South Africa in.

The Daily Telegraph argued that there would be a better chance of change in South Africa if she remained in the Commonwealth and that it could mean a precedent for others if she were to be expelled.⁸⁶ The Reynold News, on the other hand, argued for

⁸³ Irish Times, 6 March 1961.

⁸⁴ Daily Herald, 6 March 1961.

⁸⁵ Times, 4 March 1961.

⁸⁶ Daily Telegraph, 4 March 1961.

expulsion saying that there had been no change in South Africa yet, despite Commonwealth membership and that Britain in fact often "softened" her stance against the Union because of the Commonwealth.⁸⁷ Africans in South Africa "might regard the shock of isolation as good" and no other Commonwealth country discriminated against its population "by statute".

By 12 March, the day before the South African discussions began, the press was generally predicting a comfortable win for Macmillan at the conference, and newspapers on the left stepped up their call for expulsion as their prospects seemed to dim by the day. There were, however, some omens to the contrary. On 12 March the News of the World reported that Ghana's high commissioner in London had said that Ghana's position in the Commonwealth would be reconsidered if South Africa stayed in. "We don't want apartheid inside the Commonwealth. We are totally opposed to it."⁸⁸

The Reynold News reported that there was a "flood of news" in South Africa predicting that South Africa would remain in and that newspapers there had "twisted the likely truth of the matter".⁸⁹ The South African public "felt it had won already". (The Sunday Times in Johannesburg, for example, stated on 12 March under the headline "A Personal Triumph", that although the outcome was "not yet certain", Verwoerd had "created a favourable impression" and was seen as a man "of charm and culture").⁹⁰

The Observer on 12 March⁹¹ printed Nyerere's article which has been seen by many as being one of the primary causes of South Africa's withdrawal. The article was headed: "Commonwealth

⁸⁷ Reynold News, 5 March 1961.

⁸⁸ News of the World, 12 March 1961.

⁸⁹ Reynold News, 12 March 1961.

⁹⁰ Sunday Times (Johannesburg), 12 March 1961.

⁹¹ Observer, 12 March 1961.

Choice: Them or Us" and it outlined Tanganyika's threat not to apply for membership if South Africa stayed in.

The discussions on South Africa began on 13 March and almost immediately the original plan hatched by Macmillan and Menzies to separate the constitutional from the racial discussions failed. It appeared that most of the prime ministers wanted to combine the two and Verwoerd, under pressure, had reluctantly agreed. (Verwoerd said to parliament after the conference that he had made the concession of allowing the constitutional debate to be merged with the racial because "others wanted it" and "wanted it immediately".⁹² It was not in accord with what had been arranged, he said, but Macmillan had allowed it. However, he "accepted responsibility" for it).

Wood mentions the background discussions held before this by Macmillan with Diefenbaker in order to head off an Afro-Asian attack. He points out that Macmillan had dined with Diefenbaker on 10 March and had then told Welensky the following evening that Diefenbaker had promised him he would not unilaterally oppose South Africa.⁹³ In 1965 Welensky visited Canada and held conversations with Diefenbaker about their recollections of the events of the 1961 conference. Diefenbaker recalled the promise to Macmillan but said he had also warned Macmillan bluntly that if the conference sought his opinion he would make plain Canada's hostility towards South Africa. He had gone on to suggest that if he spoke last instead of first (as was the custom because of his seniority) it might help preserve South Africa's membership. He claimed that Macmillan had accepted the idea⁹⁴ but that Macmillan had later reversed the position. (There is, however, no mention of it anywhere in Macmillan's memoirs).

⁹² House of Assembly Debates, col.3495, 23 March 1961.

⁹³ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.165.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.166.

Wood notes that Menzies, in his memoirs, had blamed Diefenbaker for making an emotional speech on South Africa at the beginning of the conference.⁹⁵ Diefenbaker, however, told Welensky in 1965 that before they went into the morning session of 13 March (the first day of the South African discussions) Macmillan had told him he could not reverse the order of speaking and so Diefenbaker would have to speak first. In fact it was not he but Nehru who spoke first (as the most senior Afro-Asian prime minister). Nehru had said there was no difficulty for South Africa's membership as such but that the basis of Commonwealth co-operation was the recognition of it as a multi-racial association.⁹⁶ He had gone on to say that without a change of heart from South Africa South Africa's membership could endanger the Commonwealth's existence and influence. He insisted on condemnation of racial discrimination by the conference.

Diefenbaker had spoken next and had regretted that there was no general discussion first of the South African problem and now that powerful emotions were aroused that it would be better to have time for reflection before membership was discussed. He bluntly stated Canada's opposition to apartheid and hastily added that Canada was busy extending the vote to the Red Indians in Canada. He then reinforced Nehru's call for a declaration on racialism and said the conference should sanction it. He warned that if the conference sanctioned South Africa's membership it would amount to endorsing apartheid. It would also damage the Commonwealth's standing and bolster the communist effort in Africa. He then softened a little and suggested the postponement of the whole issue because South Africa was not yet a republic. Khan supported this and said that only if South Africa reformed could it stay in.

Only Menzies, says Wood, struck a "discordant note" correcting a "certain assertion" and noting that South Africa's membership

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.166.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.167.

had not been in question until it proposed to become a republic.⁹⁷ He decried using the membership issue to force South Africa to change its policies and cautioned that accepting a declaration on basic principles would result in future conferences ignoring the need to formulate a common view. It would just mean that it would in future "air differences". Nkrumah then ignored this and insisted on a declaration of racial equality while the Tunku agreed but said he would not oppose South Africa if the rest of the Commonwealth agreed. Holyoake of New Zealand praised this and said South Africa would have to reform if it wanted to stay in the Commonwealth but he also suggested postponement of the question.⁹⁸ But Mrs Sirmova Bandaranaike of Ceylon had then opposed this saying the Commonwealth should demonstrate its commitment to racial equality by expelling South Africa. Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria then said he was not hostile to South Africa and would accept her membership if she treated all Commonwealth members equally and exchanged diplomats as well as reformed her policies.⁹⁹

Verwoerd's case in the afternoon session was presented in the knowledge that only Menzies supported him. He stated that he hoped the debate would not set a precedent for interference in other countries' affairs and argued that the constitutional issue was just a formality. Cyprus, he noted, had been confirmed long before and he echoed Menzies in saying that there would have been no doubt of continued membership for South Africa if there had been no constitutional change.¹⁰⁰ The Commonwealth was composed of separate, sovereign and independent states and a bill of rights would mean an incomplete constitution for the Commonwealth. He defended apartheid and denied it meant oppression and said that it was a policy of different people

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.167.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.168.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p,168.

living separately but without an element of superiority. Indeed, he said, this was a principle of the Commonwealth itself. He regretted South Africa's estrangement from countries like Ghana, Malaya and others but noted that their policies were far from perfect.

Verwoerd was then subjected to a series of "searching questions" during which he reiterated there would be no diplomatic missions from unfriendly countries and that there would be no blacks in parliament because they would have their own "soon". In response to Nkrumah's demand for a bill of rights he retorted that perhaps it should also refer to democracy.¹⁰¹ After further statements and criticisms Macmillan intervened to point out that the 1960 conference had stated that constitutional change was an internal matter and that South Africa should remain in the Commonwealth as a matter of previous precedent. He did, however, acknowledge the difficulty of appearing to condone apartheid and so suggested a compromise which would entail the communique stating also the conference's disapproval of apartheid and that racial discrimination was against the ideals of the Commonwealth. This intervention did not, however, "blunt" the attack and Nkrumah, Nehru and Balewa continued to demand a statement of principles which Verwoerd continued to reject.¹⁰² Menzies and Holyoake supported Macmillan's compromise as the only practical course.

The events of that day caused the Rand Daily Mail to comment that the talks were now "In the Balance" and that the trend of discussions on 13 March had indicated that the question of membership had not been treated as a matter of procedure.¹⁰³ The Star noted the seriousness of Nyerere's letter as a threat

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.169.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.170.

¹⁰³ Rand Daily Mail, 14 March 1961.

to the conference¹⁰⁴ and, on the 14th, wondered "to what other perils we may be led by men who so blatantly put their party before their country and their tribal emotions before the good of the whole".¹⁰⁵ Die Transvaler commented under the heading "Dangerous signs" ("Gevaarlike Voortekens") that it was "unjust" to say that South Africa should apply for membership. It "should be automatic". The discussion of South Africa's race policies would be a "flagrant breach of Commonwealth principle".¹⁰⁶

In Britain, on 13 March, the Daily Worker published an "open letter" to the conference demanding "Stand Firm Against Apartheid" and referring to "Shameful pressures" by Macmillan on the others to accept South Africa's membership.¹⁰⁷ The Daily Express, on the other hand, accused the communists of goading Nkrumah into threatening to "wreck the conference".¹⁰⁸ The Daily Herald noted that Khan of Pakistan had heeded Macmillan's call to have the apartheid question treated separately from the constitutional¹⁰⁹ while the Guardian said that Nehru was seeking "decisive action" against South Africa and that the West Indies, Kenya, Uganda, Zanzibar and others might have second thoughts about Commonwealth membership.¹¹⁰ The Times noted that the opposition socialists in Canada were opposing any effort by Diefenbaker to compromise on South Africa¹¹¹ and the Irish Times claimed that Macmillan was trying to "paper over the cracks".¹¹² It also argued for a "forthright discussion" of the meaning of

¹⁰⁴ The Star, 13 March 1961.

¹⁰⁵ The Star, 15 March 1961.

¹⁰⁶ Die Transvaler, 13 March 1961.

¹⁰⁷ Daily Worker, 13 March 1961.

¹⁰⁸ Daily Express, 13 March 1961.

¹⁰⁹ Daily Herald, 13 March 1961.

¹¹⁰ Guardian, 13 March 1961.

¹¹¹ Times, 13 March 1961.

¹¹² Irish Times, 13 March 1961.

the Commonwealth in the light of the divisions and problems then evident and said the time had come for a "showdown". Keeping South Africa in had not changed anything and prime ministers might demand concessions from South Africa in return for staying in. Would the United Kingdom continue to "fence sit?"

Wood goes on to discuss the course of events on the second day, Tuesday, 14 March. It began with Macmillan's draft communique being presented to the conference. This stated previous precedent about Commonwealth membership and accepted South Africa on that basis but also claimed it had been pointed out in full debate that the procedural question could not be separated from the question of South Africa's racial policies and their effect on the multi-racial Commonwealth. Such policies were incompatible with the ideals of the Commonwealth.¹¹³ Verwoerd then rejected this as passing judgment on South Africa and Menzies supported him, noting the precedent of interference for other countries on other matters. Diefenbaker, on the other hand, saw nothing wrong with a declaration against racial discrimination and said it was necessary if the Commonwealth were to survive. He again claimed Canada was rectifying the position concerning the Red Indians and was interrupted by Menzies, annoyed at his "sanctimoniousness", who passed him a copy of a newspaper reporting the expulsion of a non-white from a Canadian hotel.¹¹⁴

After further demands for the statement on racial discrimination from Nehru, the Tunku and Nkrumah (who also advised postponement), Macmillan again intervened to advise separation of the racial issue from the constitutional. He also suggested that two further drafts, one to be drawn up by Menzies, be submitted to the afternoon session. This was done and Macmillan's new draft was presented unchanged concerning the first part which reaffirmed South Africa's membership according to precedent. The

¹¹³ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.170.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.171.

second part described the conference reaction to South Africa's policies and rejected these policies as inconsistent with Commonwealth ideals.¹¹⁵ Menzies's draft said the constitutional matter was separate from the racial although it acknowledged the difficulty of doing so and it also recorded the debate with Verwoerd saying this had made plain the effects of apartheid on millions of people and on the multi-racial Commonwealth.

The debate on the two drafts revealed the same divisions as before with Verwoerd emphatically rejecting any references to laying down of rules and claiming he would reject any communique which laid down conditions for South Africa's future membership.¹¹⁶ He stated he preferred Menzies's draft but only if he could state his disassociation from it. The others preferred Macmillan's draft but Nkrumah, Khan and Nehru wanted a bill of rights as well as more reference to the need for reform in South Africa. Macmillan suggested an adjournment to give Verwoerd time to draw up his own version. When he presented it, Verwoerd referred to the need to separate the constitutional from the racial question and stated his defence of apartheid while acknowledging the opinions of the others in opposition. However, Diefenbaker objected and said there had to be a statement of the incompatibility of South Africa's policies with Commonwealth ideals. Balewa, Nehru and Holyoake agreed and Menzies said he would accept Macmillan's draft if Verwoerd's views were included.¹¹⁷ Bandaranaike, however, stated she would refuse to accept South Africa's readmission to the Commonwealth without a change in policy. Macmillan again intervened saying everyone acknowledged the serious consequences of excluding South Africa and hoping Verwoerd would not object to his draft because it was just a statement of principles to which the others subscribed. He adjourned the conference again to give Verwoerd time to reconsider.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.172.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.173.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.174.

The British press commentary on the events of that day and the previous one (Monday 13 March) reported the ominous signs of a deadlock. The Daily Worker claimed there was a failure to reach a decision as the "storm" over apartheid continued.¹¹⁸ It reported that Macmillan's plan for a "smooth acceptance" of South Africa had collapsed and the discussions at Lancaster House lasted longer than planned. The original plan was to keep discussions on the constitutional aspects to the 13 March meeting and discussions on apartheid to "today" but it went "awry" as only Menzies and Verwoerd supported it. First to speak were Nehru, Nkrumah and Diefenbaker and then Verwoerd "surprisingly" pointed out the shortcomings in African and other Commonwealth countries. Macmillan then pleaded for no exclusion saying it would begin a precedent. Mrs Bandaranaike left suddenly (on a "cultural visit") but "more likely" on a walk-out. The application of Cyprus was then accepted.

The Scotsman reported that unlike Eric Louw a year previously, Verwoerd had "sat and listened" to his critics until the long morning session was over.¹¹⁹ Then in the afternoon he had replied with a long defence of his policies and this was followed by a second attack from the others. There had been a "change of heart" by those premiers who had agreed originally to keep the constitutional separate from the racial discussions. This change was thought to have started with Nkrumah who received "intense lobbying" from his countrymen in London and from anti-National Party groups from South Africa and from his Ghanaian party at home. Diefenbaker had put forward the idea of a Commonwealth bill of rights.

In South Africa, the Cape Times reported optimistically that, despite Verwoerd's rejection of Macmillan's drafts, it was still felt in Whitehall that Verwoerd would win by "sheer endurance and

¹¹⁸ Daily Worker, 14 March 1961.

¹¹⁹ The Scotsman, 14 March 1961.

patience" since "no one wanted his expulsion".¹²⁰ Die Transvaler reported the day's deadlock in headlines which said "Dooie Punt Oor S.A. Duur Voort...Tweede Dag Sonder 'n Beslissing" ("Deadlock on SA continues, Second Day Without a Decision").¹²¹ The Rand Daily Mail stated that "two of the tensest days for South Africa since the war" had taken place and that "Commonwealth membership never seemed so desirable as when it was in danger".¹²²

Wood's account of the last day (15 March) begins with Macmillan's statement to the effect that Verwoerd would accept his draft if allowed to justify his policies in a separate statement. Macmillan asked for adjournment to the afternoon session in order to produce such a draft. When the afternoon session assembled Macmillan outlined the discussions and efforts to that point and then read out his new draft.¹²³ The first part about constitutional precedent remained unchanged and he concentrated on the second part. It described the criticism by the conference of South Africa's policies stating again their incompatibility with Commonwealth ideals. But it mentioned Verwoerd's defence of apartheid and the view that the standards laid down in the UNO Charter were not of relevance in the Commonwealth context.

Macmillan claimed it would not suit everyone but it was the best possible compromise and he stated his desire to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth. But again he ran into opposition from both sides. Menzies objected to any reference to the UNO Charter saying it could influence the way Commonwealth members voted in UNO, and he was supported by Verwoerd in this. Diefenbaker disagreed saying the Commonwealth could not stand for less than the Charter. With Nehru's support he also claimed that Macmillan had overemphasised the views of Verwoerd. Others also claimed it

¹²⁰ Cape Times, 15 March 1961.

¹²¹ Die Transvaler, 15 March 1961.

¹²² Rand Daily Mail, 15 March 1961.

¹²³ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.175.

reflected an unbalanced view of the discussions and demanded the inclusion of a Commonwealth bill of rights. Balewa threatened to withdraw Nigeria from the Commonwealth because he said the UNO had condemned apartheid at every session and so he felt the need for the Commonwealth to accept racial equality as a basic precondition. Nkrumah threatened likewise to withdraw, provoking Verwoerd to retort he reserved the right to call for Ghana's expulsion on the grounds of its lack of respect for democracy.¹²⁴

This was the crisis point referred to by Macmillan in his memoirs.¹²⁵ He now felt the game was lost and feared that Bandaranaike or Nehru would call for a vote which would result in the splitting of the Commonwealth. Only Australia and New Zealand would have supported him and Diefenbaker would have opposed him. So he decided to "sacrifice South Africa".¹²⁶ He used an adjournment to convince Verwoerd to withdraw his application. (Alistair Horne's biography of Macmillan claims that the decision by Macmillan and Verwoerd to withdraw the South African application was originally an idea suggested apparently by Iain Macleod, the colonial secretary).¹²⁷ Verwoerd then went ahead with his withdrawal announcement saying his nation's self-respect would not allow interference in its internal affairs and that South Africa had no desire to belong to what had become a "pressure group". He had been shocked at the vindictive hostility of some members, he said, and felt the prime ministers had allowed themselves to be influenced by the Afro-Asians.¹²⁸ Opposition to South Africa was ironic in the light of the flouting of democracy in some of the Commonwealth countries present. He predicted the Commonwealth would disintegrate once

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.176.

¹²⁵ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.298-299.

¹²⁶ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.176.

¹²⁷ Horne, Macmillan, p.392.

¹²⁸ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.177.

South Africa left.

Macmillan, described as looking at his most "miserable",¹²⁹ got up and said it was inappropriate for the conference to question the decision and thanked Verwoerd for his "courtesy", expressing confidence that future Anglo-South African co-operation would continue. He read out the prepared communique concerning withdrawal. Verwoerd thanked him and got up to leave the room together with the external affairs minister, Eric Louw. Geysler reports that they were beaten to the door by a red-faced Diefenbaker who shouted triumphantly "They're out, they're out!"¹³⁰ The conference continued with Louw deputising for Verwoerd and at the final session Macmillan again expressed regret at the withdrawal.¹³¹ Nehru disagreed, however, and said withdrawal would ease world tension.

The British press commentary on the final day of the South African discussions, the day of withdrawal, reported with substantial accuracy the course of events. The Daily Mail claimed that apartheid had been condemned "Ten To One" and that South Africa had to accept this or leave. Talks had adjourned for a "Last chance".¹³² Verwoerd had a choice to submit to more denunciations or to walk out, although "none" had demanded expulsion the previous day, just the right to continue to denounce South Africa. Macleod, colonial secretary, had offered the "euphemism of the year" when asked how the conference was going and had replied: "Fine". Verwoerd had refused to agree to a communique which expressed abhorrence of South Africa's policies and believed no opinions should be stated.

The Daily Express said Macmillan's draft was rejected by Verwoerd

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.177.

¹³⁰ Geysler, Watershed, p.87.

¹³¹ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.178.

¹³² Daily Mail, 15 March 1961.

and that the Tunku had suggested Verwoerd draw up his own, which was then "immediately rejected by the others". Diefenbaker and Nkrumah had said there could be only one statement adopted by the conference and based on that of Macmillan. Khan of Pakistan had then said that the Macmillan draft should be strengthened and Macmillan was told to "get tougher".¹³³ The Guardian said a "Critical Hour" had been reached and also reported a clash in the British parliament over the UN request for the Commonwealth to put pressure on South Africa over South West Africa.¹³⁴ Government speakers had claimed it was the wrong time to bring up the SWA question at "this delicate stage".

In South Africa on 16 March glaring headlines greeted the withdrawal: "Union Quits the Club"¹³⁵, "S.A Is Uit"¹³⁶ were some of the headlines and reports which traced the course of events of the previous day. Editorial comments varied according to the political colour of the various newspapers (see next chapter: "Post-mortems and Consequences") but most English newspapers blamed Verwoerd and declared their shock at the unexpected turn of events. Afrikaans newspapers supported Verwoerd's actions and blamed the Afro-Asians for what had happened. The end of the Commonwealth was predicted.

It remains to consider the various explanations and analyses of the conference given by some historians (and protagonists themselves) and to attempt an overall assessment of "who, or what was to blame"; that, ultimately, is what has interested most commentators ever since. While the historical context of the time was crucial in setting the background "mood" or "temper" of the conference (and has been seen by some as making the expulsion of South Africa inevitable), it was decisions taken on the spot in

¹³³ Daily Express, 15 March 1961.

¹³⁴ Guardian, 15 March 1961.

¹³⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 16 March 1961.

¹³⁶ Die Transvaler, 16 March 1961.

response to changing attitudes and statements of the main protagonists that was most important.

The most recent analysis, that of J.R.T. Wood, concludes that: "It was pressure from the Afro-Asians - from Nehru and the others - that finally forced South Africa out".¹³⁷ Wood down-plays Diefenbaker's role, stating that Macmillan, Verwoerd and Menzies highlighted Diefenbaker's vital role in the withdrawal because of his throwing in his lot with the Afro-Asians instead of exerting pressure on them as Menzies and Holyoake had done. But, Wood claims, it was "difficult to imagine" that pressure would have abated on South Africa had it been allowed to stay in 1961.¹³⁸ Even if Diefenbaker had joined with Menzies, it would not have been long before the Afro-Asians exerted "intolerable pressure" and "An early withdrawal would have remained a likelihood for South Africa."

Macmillan's own account stressed that Verwoerd was mainly to blame together with the British press and Nehru.¹³⁹ He believed he could have succeeded if there had not been so much newspaper "agitation" against South Africa and if Nehru had not decided one day before the conference to urge the Afro-Asians to refuse membership while "laying pretty low" himself. He also blamed the "rigidity of Verwoerd, from whom not the "slightest concession" was forthcoming. It was his "Inflexibility" that finally "turned the balance". Concessions on African diplomats might have helped. Every proposal made by himself and Menzies, was "destroyed" by Verwoerd.¹⁴⁰ (Verwoerd, in his own defence, said the issue of concessions on black diplomats was mentioned "in passing" by various members and he had said it applied only to "unfriendly

¹³⁷ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p. 178.

¹³⁸ Wood, "The Roles of Diefenbaker, Macmillan and Verwoerd", p.178.

¹³⁹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.298.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.299.

countries").¹⁴¹

To the end Macmillan was unforgiving about Diefenbaker who, he said, "played domestic politics" and who was "intoxicated by the exuberance of his own verbosity".¹⁴² Without Diefenbaker he felt that he could have "got through" although, he acknowledged, it was probable there would have been a failure at the next conference. Macmillan's views, says Wood, were shared by Lord Home and a section of the press in South Africa.

Menzies and some conservatives in the British parliament, such as Lord Salisbury, said Macmillan should have stayed firm on the non-interference principle and that the Commonwealth would not stand up to the strain on this. But this argument, which, as Macmillan put it, was so "sound in logic and convention," broke down "against the march of events and "the force of human feelings".¹⁴³ Lord Hailsham's analogy with Allied actions against Germany because of that country's treatment of the Jews disposed of Salisbury's argument. Macmillan claimed that what "shocked" most people was that South Africa had tried to set up an "abhorrent doctrine" which the rest of the world was trying to break away from. Apartheid transposed what was "wrong" into a "right".

Geyser places some emphasis on Nehru as "one of South Africa's greatest enemies" and the roles of the other "enemies" (Diefenbaker and the Afro-Asians) of South Africa who had sabotaged the plan to separate the constitutional and racial discussions.¹⁴⁴ He agrees that Verwoerd had allowed the debates to be merged, but this, says Geyser, was evidence of Verwoerd's "sincerity" in wanting to keep South Africa in. Verwoerd, says

¹⁴¹ House of Assembly Debates, col.3492, 23 March 1961.

¹⁴² Horne, Macmillan, p.393.

¹⁴³ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, p.303.

¹⁴⁴ Geyser, Watershed, pp.82-88.

Geyser, had realised at the outset that the plan might not succeed and had asked Louw to prepare a statement that could be changed with new developments arising.

The views of contemporary South African officials such as Meiring, head of the information department and Jooste, secretary of external affairs, supported Verwoerd's decision to withdraw on the grounds of national self-respect and placed the blame on the Afro-Asians (Nehru in particular) and Diefenbaker. Jooste, for example, claimed that it was "already known before the conference began" that some of the prime ministers ("the Non-Whites and Mr Diefenbaker of Canada in particular") would once again attack South Africa's racial policies.¹⁴⁵ He also blamed Macmillan for not declaring the discussions on apartheid "out of order" and pointed out, with some justification, that Macmillan recognised all along that it would not be possible to force any concessions on racial policy from Verwoerd.¹⁴⁶

Verwoerd justified his decision to withdraw as being for the sake of his "friends" and for the sake of South Africa's "self-respect". He felt he could not allow any changes to South Africa's policies because that would "wipe out the White man in South Africa".¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, if he had allowed continued internal interference in South Africa's affairs it would have been in the knowledge that motions for expulsion could be introduced at any time (which would have meant sacrificing "our honour"). Finally, if he had decided to veto South Africa's expulsion it would have placed Britain in the "impossible position of having to choose between members". Thus he chose to voluntarily withdraw in the knowledge the United Kingdom would remain South Africa's friend and allowing the rest of the Commonwealth to stay together. He chose it because he had "no

¹⁴⁵ Jooste, Diensherinneringe, p.194.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.199.

¹⁴⁷ House of Assembly Debates, col. 3501, 23 March 1961.

other choice".¹⁴⁸

A number of conclusions can be arrived at after taking into consideration the above-mentioned comments and accounts. Firstly, it is clear that while the Afro-Asian prime ministers were the most strident in their criticism of Verwoerd at the conference their views varied in intensity and were not unanimous or even unequivocal in their demands for South Africa's exclusion from the Commonwealth. It seems that it was only after Verwoerd's unambiguous refusal, on the first day of discussions, to countenance any suggestion of reform that talk of expulsion began to be heard. It was not Nehru who brought that up, nor even Nkrumah, but the Ceylonese prime minister, Mrs Bandaranaike, who throughout the discussions seems to have adopted the hard-line position of expulsion unless significant concessions were forthcoming immediately. Her position was echoed by Ayub Khan of Pakistan who, according to Macmillan, had been offended again, as in the 1960 discussions, by what he saw as an implied racial slur by Verwoerd during the debate on non-white diplomatic representation.¹⁴⁹

Nkrumah seems to have been initially satisfied with supporting Nehru and Diefenbaker and their call for a declaration against racism and it was only after Verwoerd's refusal (supported by Menzies) to accept a minimum bill of rights or the reference to the United Nations Charter that he, together with Balewa and the Tunku, had threatened withdrawal. However, the emphasis given by Verwoerd in his account of the dramatic clash with Nkrumah over the issue of democracy and racism seems to have been taken up by the South Africans as evidence of Nkrumah's status as the "enemy number one" of the conference. In his statement to the Ghanaian National Assembly on 18 April 1961, Nkrumah said:

Hitherto there have been two possible approaches to

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., col. 3502, 23 March 1961.

¹⁴⁹ Macmillan, Pointing the Way, pp.299-300.

the South African problem...persuasion and force of example... to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth.I have always had my gravest doubts about the success of any such policy. However, we did apply it in the years which followed independence[and]...offered to exchange diplomatic representatives with South Africa ...[But] ...it became clear...that the South African government would never accept diplomatic representatives from any indigenous African state.¹⁵⁰

Nehru has been seen in a similar light although he adopted a more subdued role than traditionally ascribed to him and did not appear to have made threats of withdrawal from the Commonwealth. This did not stop him being identified by Macmillan as a prime cause of South Africa's withdrawal. In anti-apartheid circles Nehru (and Nkrumah) were also identified (proudly) as being the prime movers behind it all. The London correspondent of the Cape Town weekly, New Age, stated:

Mr Nehru and Dr Nkrumah were largely instrumental in removing South Africa from the Commonwealth....As Mr Nehru advanced his powerful arguments against Apartheid and his pointed questions about inequality, the Australian and New Zealand Premiers froze into silence, while Mr Macmillan, with a discredited Central African policy in his hands, shuffled uncomfortably.¹⁵¹

Nehru's speech to the Lok Sabha on 24 March was quoted at the beginning of this section.¹⁵² It put the blame squarely on Verwoerd's intransigence and went on to say that:

¹⁵⁰ Mansergh, Documents and Speeches, p.400.

¹⁵¹ Reported in Indian Opinion, 31 March 1961.

¹⁵² See p.311.

This was a very significant step that the Commonwealth took, but I believe that it has strengthened it and certainly not weakened it. It has even a wider significance than it might appear at first sight, because thereby the question of racial equality has been put on the highest level in the world context.¹⁵³

As for Diefenbaker, one can only concur with Wood that his role had been exaggerated by Macmillan and the South Africans. It was not he who first suggested the contentious bill of rights, but Nehru, and although he stuck fairly rigidly to the idea and was supported by the Afro-Asians, he never, it seems, called for South Africa's expulsion and was initially at least prepared to postpone the whole issue. Perhaps it was because he was seen by Macmillan and Verwoerd as breaking the solidarity of the white prime ministers that his role had been so strongly portrayed.

Diefenbaker's speech in explanation of his attitude at the conference was to the Canadian parliament on 17 March 1961. He said:

I took the position that if we were to accept South Africa's request unconditionally our action would be taken as approval or at least condonation of racial policies which are repugnant to and unequivocally abhorred and condemned by Canadians as a whole ... We have declared that non-discrimination on the basis of race and colour is the foundation stone of a multi-racial association composed of representatives from all parts of the world.¹⁵⁴

Macmillan's role as chairman needs some reassessment. It might be argued that his determination to keep South Africa in had blinded him to the intensity of feelings of the Afro-Asians and

¹⁵³ Mansergh, Documents and Speeches, p.390.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.369-370.

that he consciously or unconsciously gave priority to Britain's interests rather than those of the whole Commonwealth. (In private Macmillan had told Harold Evans, his public relations and Press adviser, that it was the loyal British people he had met in the Union in 1960 and people in Durban who referred to Britain as the "Old Country" that he cared most about).¹⁵⁵ But ultimately he was prepared to sacrifice South Africa for the sake of Commonwealth solidarity and that was the solution that he saw to be in Britain's best interests - as long as the economic and strategic connection remained (which he had deftly ensured by drawing Verwoerd in from the beginning on his side).

Nevertheless it is tempting to speculate whether a different solution might have been reached under a chairman with less to lose from the economic and political point of view and with less of an emotional interest in the whole debate, such as Holyoake of New Zealand, for example, or even Diefenbaker. Putting one of the Afro-Asians in the "hot seat" may also have had interesting results. A statesman with the stature of Nehru, whose commitment to the Commonwealth ideal and even to the principle of non-interference was never in doubt, may well have swayed the conference towards a consensus on allowing South Africa to stay in (at least until the next conference).

But that brings the argument back to Verwoerd (and his closest supporter, Menzies of Australia). Verwoerd and Menzies stood firm on the non-interference principle and although they were prepared to countenance a separate statement of opinions against South Africa they drew the line at the proposal for a minimum statement of principles which might have bound their respective governments to future policy directions. In this Menzies was just as intransigent as Verwoerd, although he had advised Verwoerd initially to accept Macmillan's first draft.

After the conference Menzies said that if he had been in

¹⁵⁵ Horne, Macmillan, p.393.

Verwoerd's shoes he would have done the same, withdrawn from the Commonwealth.¹⁵⁶ Staying in would have meant dividing the Commonwealth into those for and those against South Africa. Menzies went on to say it was all "a most unhappy affair. I make no secret of my own view. I wanted to keep South Africa in". He argued that a precedent was being set for criticising the internal affairs of member states, for example, Australia's own migration laws. The fact that South Africa was out could even have the effect of "stiffening the government's racial policies", he surmised. "I won't mention any names", he said, "but certainly the most extreme speeches were made at the closing stages". He concluded by saying that boycotts would be counter-productive and would affect the blacks more than the whites.

But even Menzies hoped for some small sign from Verwoerd of a willingness to make concessions on racial policy, in particular on the question of diplomatic representation. Whether such a concession would have satisfied the conference in its later stages of heated discussion is a matter for speculation. It would probably, as Verwoerd, Jooste, Meiring and others claimed, have led to demands for more concessions and to South Africa's eventual expulsion at a later date. But if it had been offered by Verwoerd on the first day of discussions different results altogether may have been expected.

While, therefore, South Africa's apartheid policies, the rise of African nationalism and the new emphasis in the UNO on anti-colonialism provided the general context and the long-term background to eventual expulsion from the Commonwealth, Verwoerd ultimately bears most of the personal responsibility for the failure of the conference. One commentator has pointed out that Verwoerd's actions at the conference "reflected a passivity, if not an active disinterest, about the utility of continued

¹⁵⁶ INCH, PV 4 (Eric Louw Collection), File No.112 (Statebonds Konferensies: Diverse Stukke, 1928-1961), No. 12, Report from the office of the Australian High Commissioner in South Africa, 19 March 1961.

participation [in the Commonwealth], and a preoccupation with building up South African support against a threatening world".¹⁵⁷ Verwoerd made no effort to conciliate Nehru and Nkrumah at the conference and had turned the outcome into a victory on his return. Piet Meiring, the head of the department of information, was told by Eric Louw as the latter walked out of the conference: "For heaven's sake, don't look so glum. This is not the end of the world. I would rather call it good riddance of bad company".¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Seiler, "South African Responses to External Pressures", p.455.

¹⁵⁸ Meiring, Inside Information, p.166.

Chapter 20: Post-Mortems and Consequences. Post script on the High Commission Territories

(a) Post-conference reactions

The attitude of the official opposition party in South Africa to the withdrawal from the Commonwealth was summed up in the words of De Villiers Graaff's reply to Verwoerd in parliament on 23 March 1961. He noted three things : firstly, that the mission overseas was a "miserable failure which brought great comfort apparently to the communist countries of the world" and dismay to those on the Western side.¹ Secondly, it could all have been avoided if the prime minister and his party had not "gambled recklessly" with South Africa's Commonwealth membership. Thirdly, there would be "repercussions" for South Africa that would require the "greatest statesmanship" from all groups in the country. He went on to criticise the SABC for becoming a "propaganda machine" for the government and for portraying the events in London as a victory for Verwoerd.²

Dr Steytler, for the Progressive Party, referred to what Verwoerd and Louw had called "national honour" and claimed that South Africa could not run the risk of "national suicide" for the sake of national honour.³ The "baaskap regime" of twelve years of National Party rule had brought South Africa to this point and this was why South Africa was no longer in the Commonwealth. Verwoerd's plea to unite in order to maintain white domination would only lead to further isolation and ostracism.⁴

Harry Oppenheimer, speaking for those English South Africans who were still attached to the Commonwealth connection and for the

¹ House of Assembly Debates, cols.3510-11, 23 March 1961.

² Ibid., col.3512, 23 March 1961.

³ Ibid., cols.3539-3540, 23 March 1961.

⁴ Ibid., col.3541, 23 March 1961.

parliamentary opposition, said at a graduation ceremony at Natal University that no treaties or understandings with Britain and other former Commonwealth partners could compensate for the "old ties" that had been broken and for the confidence that had been "shattered".⁵ It had been a "grave setback" to national unity because one section of the population had been seen to "rejoice" at the other section's loss of something to which it had a "deep emotional attachment". Most serious of all, said Oppenheimer, was the fact that it was a "moral disaster" for South Africa because "our withdrawal was occasioned by the unanimous condemnation of South African policy by every member of the Commonwealth, including our closest friends.

In a similar vein, the leading opposition newspapers saw it all as a huge blow for South Africa but at the same time claimed it demonstrated the need for reform. The Cape Times, expressed "bitter resentment of the mess which has been made".⁶ The Star, in an editorial entitled "The Reason Why", blamed Verwoerd for not giving "the smallest degree of compromise"⁷ and the Rand Daily Mail stated that this was not the beginning of the end of the Commonwealth but would instead strengthen the organisation and its "moral cohesion".⁸ The Commonwealth had demonstrated it was founded on certain "democratic and human principles" but South Africa had found itself "the odd man out".

Round Table's commentary on the withdrawal was written in tones of sadness tinged with forebodings for the future. Entitled "A Leaf Falls",⁹ it noted that Verwoerd's decision "should be a matter of regret" to the whole Commonwealth and "in particular"

⁵ Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No.7, 1 April 1961.

⁶ Cape Times, 16 March 1961.

⁷ The Star, 25 July 1961.

⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 17 March 1961.

⁹ Round Table, Vol.51, No.203, June 1961, pp.219-223.

to the board and staff members of the Round Table, the origins of which were in the review publications for the Closer Union Societies that promoted the establishment of the Union of South Africa. It promised to continue reporting and criticising developments in the Republic which would not soon or "lightly" be thought of as an "alien land". It would maintain contact with "those elements" in the country which were able to work in harmony with the "more liberal thought of the Commonwealth" and would look forward to the day when they "win over" the electors to their side".

In a further article of the same issue, entitled "South Africa Departs",¹⁰ a more detailed analysis of the causes and consequences of withdrawal was offered which put considerable blame on Verwoerd and the National Party for creating the impression among the electorate at the time of the republican referendum that membership of the Commonwealth was assured. It also questioned Verwoerd's "curious" statement on his return to South Africa to the effect that a "miracle" had been achieved in London.¹¹ Verwoerd had explained this later as meaning that South Africa could still be out of the Commonwealth and retain friendship with Britain.¹²

As for the Nationalist reaction, it was demonstrated by the jubilant airport welcome for Verwoerd on his return.¹³ The historian, D.W. Krüger, noted that:

Afrikaner nationalists were not unduly perturbed about the exclusion of South Africa from the Commonwealth which they had always regarded as a disguised Empire. They saw no benefit in any further association with a

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.235-242.

¹¹ Ibid., p.238.

¹² Round Table, Vol.51, No.203, June 1961, p.238.

¹³ Meiring, Inside Information, p.168.

Commonwealth which had utterly changed its character and with which South Africa had far less in common than with many other States outside.¹⁴

Verwoerd stated to parliament on his return from the conference that the character of the group had changed in the previous ten months and "the United Kingdom realised this as well".¹⁵ It was no longer a family of nations and had become like the UNO "on a small scale".

The Afrikaans press supported Verwoerd's actions to the hilt. Die Burger stated on 16 March that Verwoerd could not continue to subject himself to the judgments and criticisms of the other members and that is why South Africa was "out". It was done, in effect, to maintain "our national honour".¹⁶ It noted, however, that "clear dangers" remained for South Africa's foreign relations and that the damage would have to be limited. Relations with Britain, Australia and New Zealand would be strengthened because they "all did what they could, apparently". It also expressed some sympathy for the "section of South African opinion which valued Commonwealth membership" and argued the need to use the opportunity to "build bridges".

Die Transvaler adopted a more triumphal approach under an editorial entitled "End of the Commonwealth" ("Einde van die Statebond").¹⁷ It stated that most "voters" in South Africa would not "shed a tear" for the loss of Commonwealth and claimed that "without a doubt" the Commonwealth was dying and belonged to the past. Blacks "now had the majority" in the Commonwealth and that was "definitely the axe to the root" of the organization.

¹⁴ Krüger, Making of a Nation, p.335.

¹⁵ House of Assembly Debates, col.3482-3484, 23 March 1961.

¹⁶ Die Burger, 16 March 1961.

¹⁷ Die Transvaler, 16 March 1961.

One year after withdrawal Verwoerd was saying that even though South Africa had thought itself to be independent in the Commonwealth, the bindings to the monarchy had been, in fact, limitations on complete independence.¹⁸ This feeling, he said, disappeared with the republic and when South Africa left the Commonwealth. Other countries now saw South Africa as a fully independent state without having to keep "half an eye" on London. The "subtle atmosphere of seniority" vis-a-vis the United Kingdom had disappeared and now it was a case of "Staat tot Staat" relations ("a relationship of one independent country to the other"). It meant, he said, the "fulfilment of an ideal" of the greater part of the population and meant the end of the "gulf" between English and Afrikaner.

The reaction of the two most important extra-parliamentary movements representing the non-white majority was in favour of South Africa's exclusion from the Commonwealth but they differed as to the way forward thereafter. In a publication put out by the banned PAC in May 1961, which criticised the ANC's call for a general strike and a stay-at-home to protest against the inauguration of the republic, it was noted that the ANC was wrong to protest against the "white republic".¹⁹ It went on to ask the question what the change "from one form of White Government to another" meant to the PAC, or why "we should protest" against a president instead of a governor-general which was all the change really meant. The rights of the Africans were being sacrificed on the "altar of multi-racialism" and it was nationalism that had made England the most powerful of European countries for a time. It was the "PAC programme", however, that had set in motion a process "that pushed out the Christian barbarians from the Commonwealth". The objective of severing the South African link

¹⁸ INCH, PV93 (Verwoerd Collection), File 1/47/1/6 (Republiekwording: 1960-62), A1/7, No.8, "Die Betekenis Van Republiekwording vir Suid Afrika", Message from Dr Verwoerd, De Wildt, December 1962.

¹⁹ AD 2186 (ANC Collection), Box H(b) Publications - periodicals, No. 17. "Mafube", May 1961.

with the Commonwealth was "to isolate our adversaries".

We ourselves are republicans and cannot very well fight republicanism. The New Africa will be a Republic, not a Monarchy. We will have nothing to do with the Queen of England or any other queen for that matter. It is precisely because we are succeeding in isolating South Africa that the Whites here would have us join issue with them by way of demonstrating on the eve of the declaration of a Republic that has been kicked out of the Commonwealth. Most Whites would be happy with a Republic within the Commonwealth, not sparing a thought for our long-standing difficulties as an oppressed people.²⁰

Albert Luthuli, for the ANC, had welcomed South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth the day after it had occurred.²¹ But the manner in which Verwoerd had achieved withdrawal from the Commonwealth was condemned in a pamphlet put out by the Congress of Democrats which said that "He went to London to try and keep South Africa in the Commonwealth. He failed. That was not a victory. It was a defeat for him."²² It went on to say that even Macmillan, who was one of Verwoerd's "mildest critics", spoke truly when he said that the Union's policy seemed "altogether remote from, and indeed abhorrent to, the ideals for which mankind is struggling in this country".

The reaction of the Natal newspaper with a mainly Zulu-speaking readership, Ilanga Lase Natal, was to ask what interest Africans had in the whole matter. It noted that "young Africans" thought that keeping South Africa in the Commonwealth would mean condoning government race policies, while the older felt that

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Reported in the Yorkshire Post, 16 March 1961.

²² AD 2186, H(a) Publications - Pamphlets, No.17, "In Defence of South Africa", Congress of Democrats, n.d.

South Africa "should stay in" because "isolation would encourage the government to continue its race policies".²³ There was, however, "another school of thought" that stated that since nine million South Africans were never consulted they have no interest in the matter. The mere fact that the Commonwealth conference should have created such "conflicting views" among Africans illustrated the "dangers of non-consultation and non-co-operation."

The World's editorial on withdrawal was entitled "Now is the hour for Verwoerd to keep his word" and it noted that whether Africans "exulted" or were in "sorrow" about the loss of Commonwealth membership the fact was that Verwoerd had been strengthened.²⁴ "Even some English whites think he has done a great thing." Verwoerd now had to prove his Bantustan policy was not just an "opium smoke" disguising the "supremacy of whites". Time was on "the Africans' side", it concluded.

Indian Opinion wrote an editorial on the progress of the talks which was published on 17 March but which had been written before Verwoerd's "dramatic announcement" of withdrawal.²⁵ It expressed considerable disappointment at the developments during the conference to that point noting that South Africa's membership seemed to be assured and that Britain had used its financial clout to brow-beat the Afro-Asians into accepting South Africa - "a sad commentary on either the economic weakness of the Afro-Asian countries or on their attitude to self-respect". On 24 March, however, a new editorial brought matters up to date and was entitled "A Worsening Future".²⁶ It noted Verwoerd's "triumphant" return and the reception accorded him which resembled "public appearances of the Nazi leader, Hitler". It

²³ Ilanga Lase Natal, 18 March 1961.

²⁴ The World, 25 March 1961.

²⁵ Indian Opinion, 17 March 1961.

²⁶ Indian Opinion, 24 March 1961.

claimed that he had gone to the conference determined to defy Commonwealth opinion and had "planned the dramatic withdrawal in order to become a demi-god in the eyes of the Nationalists in South Africa".

The consequences were that non-Europeans would have to face a "worsening future" in South Africa. The question was to what extent Britain and Australia would enter into "collusion" with South Africa by signing bilateral agreements to "cushion the effects of withdrawal". Verwoerd would try to draw the older Commonwealth members together against the Afro-Asians and Menzies of Australia had already "responded to his overtures". The "die-hard" Tories in England would try the same by urging the government to sign "most favoured nation" treaties with South Africa, thus flouting the sentiments of the Afro-Asian prime ministers.

Newspaper commentary on South Africa's withdrawal in Britain and Ireland was mostly against Verwoerd and on the side of the Commonwealth but two leading British newspaper refrained from expressing any blame. The Times editorial entitled "The Commonwealth Preserved" ended with the words:

Relief that the Commonwealth has stood an unprecedented strain must be coupled with a message of heartfelt goodwill to the peoples of all colours in the Union of South Africa.²⁷

The Financial Times editorial on withdrawal stated that:

The chief function of the Commonwealth in the world today is to form a bridge between white and coloured, rich and poor, neutral and committed. That bridge has been preserved. But the price has been a high one -

²⁷ Times, 17 March 1961.

the loss of one of the Commonwealth members.²⁸

The Daily Sketch said "We must work for the day when white South Africans realise their policy is out of step with the world and reapply for admission to the Commonwealth."²⁹

The Irish Times had an editorial entitled "Good Riddance" which compared the situation with the time Ireland left the Commonwealth and when Ireland had been criticised as "politically uninspired" and "troublesome". If the Commonwealth was to maintain a voice in the Free World it was "well rid of South Africa".³⁰ But it was pointed out that the crisis in the Commonwealth was not yet over and that one group of states wanted close relations with South Africa to continue while others did not. An "Irish Solution" was being discussed on citizenship and other questions and Britain was "eager to be friendly".

The Glasgow Herald reported the "shock" with which the news was received in the House of Commons with the Labour MP, James Callaghan, saying that his first thoughts were for the millions of whites and blacks who disagreed with apartheid.³¹ Socialists regretted that they would be cut off from the Commonwealth but said that the "struggle" would grow:

Those who will suffer most in isolation are those to whom the Commonwealth meant something more than economic preferences: the South Africans, Dutch and English, who fought for the United Kingdom when Dr Verwoerd sympathised with her enemies. Those whom the Commonwealth action may be designed to help will gain nothing now that their rulers have lost touch with the more liberal outside world.

²⁸ Financial Times, 16 March 1961.

²⁹ Daily Sketch, 16 March 1961.

³⁰ Irish Times, 16 March 1961.

³¹ Glasgow Herald, 16 March 1961.

The short and long-term consequences of withdrawal were difficult to predict at the time but most commentators then and since have noted how little change there was in South Africa's relations with the "old" Commonwealth countries at first. At the same time one can also note how soon it was that the English-speaking South Africans forgot about their ties to the Commonwealth and became reconciled to their new republic. Round Table noted in June 1961 that: "Nowhere... was there the opinion being expressed that South Africa's return to the Commonwealth was a matter of "practical politics". Before March 15 it was probable that policy on the lines of the United Party's would have been seen as sufficiently liberal to keep South Africa in but not long after it was accepted that even a policy as "advanced" as that of the Progressive Party would be insufficient to get her re-admitted.³²

The United Party leader, De Villiers Graaff, noted only a few months after withdrawal that there was a price that the UP was not prepared to pay for readmission to the Commonwealth and that included white leadership. The party conference at the end of the year also ruled out a return to the Commonwealth unless it were in South Africa's interests.³³ The staunch defender of the British connection in Natal, Douglas Mitchell, had also put racial solidarity above sentiment when in September he said that South Africa would only return to a "White Commonwealth".³⁴

Vale notes that the main consequence for English South Africans was that with the loss of the Commonwealth and British connections their views took on more of a "truly South African coloration" and increasingly put their support behind the Nationalists.³⁵ A more "bi-partisan" approach in foreign affairs between government and the UP opposition was the result. Those

³² Round Table, Vol.51, No.203, June 1961, p.240.

³³ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.83.

³⁴ Reported in Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No.17, 4 September 1961, p.8.

³⁵ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.418.

who could not accept the loss of Commonwealth or the racial policies of both main parties threw their lot in with the "sharper" opposition policies of the Progressives.³⁶

Verwoerd had gambled on an early election to capitalise on the growing support in the ranks of the English speakers for his race policies and his decision to withdraw from the Commonwealth. In election speeches he said that the idea of rejoining the Commonwealth was "unrealistic" because of the dominance of the Afro-Asians and because the British EEC application would have an effect on the binding factors of the Commonwealth.³⁷ How could it be in South Africa's interest to return to the Commonwealth, he argued, when preferences had disappeared and when the Afro-Asian group was giving instructions.

The results of the election confirmed the National Party's diagnosis of the white electorate's feelings concerning the events of that year. There was an overwhelming election victory for the NP on 18 October, with the NP winning 115 out of 160 seats and with only two seats short of a two-thirds majority in parliament.³⁸ Although the UP had increased its seats from 42 to 49 it had lost votes, whereas the PP only obtained one seat, that of Helen Suzman in Houghton. For the first time since 1948 the Nationalists actually polled more votes than the official opposition.³⁹ It was after this election that the two new English-speaking ministers were appointed to cabinet, Frank Waring and E.A. Trollip, with Waring saying that he was one of thousands of English who were "not prepared to hand over

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No.17, 4 September 1961, p.12.

³⁸ Ibid., Vol.8, No.21, 30 October 1961, p.1.

³⁹ The voting figures as quoted by Digest of South African Affairs were 370431 NP, 302875 UP and 69042 PP. (Ibid., Vol.8, No.22, 13 November 1961, p.3).

political responsibility to the Blacks".⁴⁰ As Barber and Barratt put it, "overall the English speakers were being invited to join in the defence of the white state, not to have a full share in controlling it".⁴¹

(b) British-South African relations after withdrawal

As for the consequences of withdrawal for South Africa's relations with Britain, one commentator has noted that it "at least enabled South Africa to preserve its vital commercial and diplomatic relations with Britain outside of what was to become the highly-charged anti-Apartheid Commonwealth forum".⁴² Or, as Miller has noted, it was "business as usual" for Britain and South Africa.⁴³

However, this was not apparent at first to many people because of the conflicting statements which seemed to be coming out of South Africa and Britain soon after withdrawal. Round Table noted in June 1961 Verwoerd's desire to keep on friendly terms with Britain but there were, "on the other flank", statements by the Commonwealth secretary, Duncan Sandys, to the effect that South Africa could not expect the same treatment as Ireland. Similarly, African leaders such as Tom Mboya were saying that by continuing to grant South Africa economic preferences some Commonwealth countries would be undoing the "good work" of the London conference.⁴⁴

During the debate in the British parliament on 22 March concerning South Africa's withdrawal, Sandys gave an ambiguous outline of his government's future intentions. He said that

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.92.

⁴² Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p. 416.

⁴³ Quoted in Vale, pp.419-420.

⁴⁴ Round Table, Vol. 51, No.203, June 1961, p.241.

Britain would no longer be inhibited about expressing opinions about apartheid in the UNO but would not ignore the "legal position".⁴⁵ Britain did not believe in "loosely worded resolutions". On defence ties with South Africa after withdrawal he had said that while several years previously the special arrangements regarding the Middle East had lapsed, there were still other arrangements such as the Simonstown Agreement that continued. These arrangements would be the subject of "examination" but there were no commitments yet.

He had heard some suggestions concerning citizenship that South Africans should be given the same status as the Irish. But Ireland was a geographical part of the British Isles and so was a "different situation". As for trading relations, they rested on bilateral agreements and withdrawal from the Commonwealth did not affect them. He had welcomed Dr Verwoerd's statement that South Africa wished to remain a member of the sterling area and he hoped that trade between the two countries would be "maintained and expanded". However, he added that although he was aware Verwoerd thought there would be no changes in the British-South African relationship and that Verwoerd hoped for continued strong links, "for us the Commonwealth is more than just 'bilateral links'...it is above all a collective relationship in which we move towards thinking, working together for broad, common objectives". He also said Britain had to be careful "not to destroy the value of Commonwealth membership by giving to those who are not members all the privileges of those who are".

The UP opposition leader in South Africa, De Villiers Graaff, quoted from this speech in support of his view that Verwoerd had been mistaken in believing that relations with Britain would not

⁴⁵ CA, A1646 (Dönges Collection), Vol.331 (Republic: July 1953 - May 1961), Minute 11/45 (United Kingdom Information Office Cape Town), Press Note 134, Text of Speech by Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations replying to Debate on South Africa in House of Commons, 22 March 1961.

change.⁴⁶ He expressed doubts about the "non-contractual preferences" and what would become of them as well as agreements such as the Commonwealth sugar quota and surmised that if there were to be a change of government in England these could easily be ended. He quoted a former Labour colonial secretary, A. Dugdale, who had said that South Africa should be treated as a "foreign country as she had chosen to be one".⁴⁷ Eric Louw replied by quoting the export-import figures to show that British exports to South Africa exceeded South African exports to Britain by some £82m in 1960 and no one could "imagine for one moment" that Britain would risk losing such a valuable trade "just because she does not like our colour policy".⁴⁸

Louw's predictions were in fact correct. Economic and military (Simonstown and arms sales) connections continued and South Africa remained one of the most important export markets for Britain. Indeed, as Vale points out,⁴⁹ the "economic imperative" together with British responsibilities in the protectorates and the Rhodesias ensured that there could be no suggestion of any support by Britain for the calls by the Afro-Asian and communist blocs for the breaking of all ties with the Republic.

As far as Britain's UNO voting record was concerned its soon became clear that "Yes" votes on apartheid resolutions would be watered down by refusal to endorse sub-paragraphs that sought specific measures against South Africa. The British representative in the Special Political Committee in early April had supported the Asian-sponsored resolution condemning apartheid but had refused to endorse the paragraphs advising "separate or collective action" against South Africa.⁵⁰ He had said earlier

⁴⁶ House of Assembly Debates, col. 3523, 23 march 1961.

⁴⁷ Ibid., col.3525, 23 March 1961.

⁴⁸ Ibid., col.3531, 23 March 1961.

⁴⁹ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", pp.419-420.

⁵⁰ Commonwealth Survey, Vol. 7, No.10, 9 May 1961, p.466.

in a debate on South West Africa that:

The United Kingdom Government had, by its policies in Africa and elsewhere, probably done more than anyone to throw the practice of Apartheid into isolation and it had no wish to defend its application, but the United Kingdom declined to vote for resolutions which though sometimes acceptable in substance were objectionable in law.⁵¹

The reaction from Verwoerd, was, in any case, reassuring to the British government. He made a public statement in April saying that he did not regard the British vote as an "unfriendly act" nor as signifying the end of bonds of friendship between the two nations.⁵²

It was not long before the British government was to be arguing for the preservation of British-South African bilateral ties as a matter of utmost priority and in the interest of both governments. This was evident in the British cabinet discussions on the "Standstill" bill (which allowed for a continuation of the status quo in British-South African relations at least until 31 May 1962), and other longer-term bilateral issues following withdrawal.

While Sandys had been arguing in parliament that the impression should be avoided that South Africa was still a Commonwealth country "in all but name", he was suggesting to Cabinet that bilateral interests should be preserved and that temporary arrangements should be made allowing South Africa to be treated in British law "as a Commonwealth country".⁵³ His memorandum of

⁵¹ Ibid., p.469.

⁵² Reported in Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No.8. 14 April 1961, p.5.

⁵³ PRO, CAB 129/104, C.(61)39, "South Africa -Consequences of Withdrawal from the Commonwealth", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 17 March 1961.

17 March noted Verwoerd's desire to maintain good relations and to co-operate as in the past and stated that the "range of interests on both sides was so wide that it would be impossible for us to arrive at a permanent settlement with the Union Government before the Republic is declared". It was advised that a short "Standstill" bill be introduced whose purpose would be to "preserve the existing position for a period of say ten months from 31 May". This, wrote Sandys, would give Britain "elbow room" for negotiations and South Africa "would continue to be treated under United Kingdom law as though she were still a Commonwealth country".

I think this would be perfectly acceptable to our Commonwealth partners. It is certainly the most practical way of ensuring that we arrive at a full and sensible bilateral understanding with South Africa.

The British cabinet discussed these recommendations on 21 March and discussion showed there was general agreement in principle with the Commonwealth secretary's proposal and that it "would be important to avoid giving the impression that after her withdrawal South Africa was to remain a member of the Commonwealth in all but name".⁵⁴ But a more sufficient period was required for the "Standstill" bill to apply so as to allow all the problems to be "fully considered". The expiry date was therefore amended to 31 May 1962.

The "Standstill" bill was introduced by Sandys in the Commons on 29 March. It was entitled the "Republic of South Africa (Temporary Provisions) Bill" and was described by the Commonwealth secretary as "a ...measure designed to maintain unchanged the laws governing the relationship between the United Kingdom... and South Africa for a period of one year after the

⁵⁴ CAB 128/35 Part 1, C.C.(61)15, 7, 21 March 1961, pp.100-101.

latter becomes a republic on 31 May 1961".⁵⁵ Sandys claimed the bill was necessary as the withdrawal of South Africa had created some legal problems which could not be settled "hurriedly" or "without negotiation" with the Union Government. The bill would give a "breathing space" during which both governments could consider the important questions which had to be answered. These included the question of nationality and citizenship, financial arrangements and the relationship with the three high commission territories.

From the South African side a similar process of stock-taking had begun concerning the effects of withdrawal and memoranda from the various state departments in 1961 had been collected by Dönges in reply to a questionnaire his finance department sent out on how a republic outside the Commonwealth would affect certain treaties with Commonwealth countries.⁵⁶ The replies, which later formed the basis of various pieces of legislation tidying up the legal position after withdrawal, were notable for the degree of conservatism they expressed about the future relationship and their recommendations were, on the whole, in favour of unchanged relations with "old" Commonwealth countries while a "wait-and-see" attitude would be adopted concerning the reactions of the newer members. All of this concurred with the policy framework announced by Verwoerd in the Assembly in March when he had expressed the desire for normal relations to continue with South Africa's Commonwealth "friends". They also reflected the desire not to alienate English speakers in the interests of national "reconciliation" and thus recommended avoiding petty restrictions on matters like citizenship and immigration.

While the British "Standstill" bill was being debated and ratified (with some Labour Party opposition) in the British parliament Sandys was sending morale-boosting telegrams to all

⁵⁵ Commonwealth Survey, Vol.7, No.8, 11 April 1961, p.361.

⁵⁶ A 1646 (Dönges), Vol.331, MIN 11/45 (Republic: 1961 June - November), "Summary of Departmental Memoranda on Commonwealth Relations", n.d.

the British high commissioners in Commonwealth countries outlining the position as he saw it after withdrawal.⁵⁷ In them he reiterated the point made in parliament on 22 March that South Africa's withdrawal had had the effect of "uniting more closely the nations of the Commonwealth". Now the "crisis" was over there was "no doubt" the unity and moral standing of the Commonwealth throughout the world had increased. South Africa's departure provided the "psychological climate for a new step forward in Commonwealth co-operation". He told them that "we" should now "take the lead" in strengthening Commonwealth links and widening the scope of consultation on matters of common ground.

In London, however, the South African United Front headed by Dr Dadoo and Oliver Tambo began to organise an international campaign for world-wide economic sanctions against South Africa. Dr Dadoo was quoted as saying:

What we want now is an embargo on South Africa - no trade, no oil shipments, no port and landing facilities for South African transport - in fact complete isolation of White South Africa from our continent.⁵⁸

The Labour opposition newspaper, Tribune, called for the end to all economic preferences and facilities which South Africa had enjoyed as a Commonwealth member and noted that: "To continue to provide these facilities not only negates the result of South African withdrawal, but is also unfair to members of the Commonwealth. South Africa must pay the full price".⁵⁹

But only a month after the republic had been inaugurated under

⁵⁷ PRO, CAB 129/104, C.(61)40, "Cabinet: The Commonwealth", Note by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 5 April 1961.

⁵⁸ Indian Opinion, 31 March 1961.

⁵⁹ Tribune, 26 May 1961.

conditions of virtual martial law, the British cabinet was discussing the question of arms supplies to South Africa and was arguing for their continuance subject to certain conditions. It also discussed how best to preserve its economic interests in the country and considered how to placate South Africa over the issue of refugees into the high commission territories. It was also considered whether repealing the relevant sections of the South Africa Act of 1909 was advisable for the territories' future.

At the June cabinet meeting on defence agreements the British defence minister, Harold Watkinson, reported the outcome of discussions with the South Africans.⁶⁰ He noted that the South Africans had withdrawn their request for small arms ammunition and had thus "saved us the embarrassment of having to refuse this on the ground that it might be connected in the public mind with measures to suppress civil disturbances".

A list of other requirements had been submitted by the South Africans, including aircraft, and in accordance with the conclusions of the cabinet's Africa Committee it was advised that the supply of items required primarily "for military purposes" should continue, subject to usual inter-departmental procedures. The Simonstown Agreement would be maintained and the South African government would relinquish the radar sites in the territories to which Britain was committed under existing defence arrangements. It was noted that "It might, however, be difficult to dissuade them from pressing for the right to send troops through the high commission territories to South West Africa." The cabinet agreed that

although some caution had to be exercised in applying in respect of the export of arms a selective policy based on political factors, a distinction could properly be drawn between items required for defence purposes and those which might be used for suppression

⁶⁰ PRO, CAB 128/35, Part 1, C.C.(61)36, 5, 29 June 1961.

of internal disturbances.

Those required "primarily for military purposes" would therefore continue to be supplied subject to usual departmental procedures. This was to remain as British policy, despite United Nations calls for a comprehensive arms embargo, until the election of a Labour government in 1964. (Even the Labour Party, however, on grounds of economic expediency, could not bring itself to cancel orders for aircraft placed by South Africa during Macmillan's premiership).

On 2 August the lord chancellor, Viscount Kilmuir, submitted to cabinet a memorandum on future relations with South Africa that stated that the inter-departmental commission set up in March to make recommendations on matters concerning future relations had completed most of its work. Matters requiring urgent consideration such as political and economic consultations, the supply of arms and general defence co-operation had been "satisfactorily disposed of".⁶¹ The Africa Committee of cabinet was busy considering matters such as sugar exports and tactics for discussions with South Africa on future relations. Such matters dealt with by the Africa Committee were guided by the general principles enunciated by Sandys in parliament on 22 March to the effect that "we should avoid continuing to give South Africa 'Commonwealth treatment' unless it appeared clearly in our interests to do so". The Africa Committee agreed with this principle and with the "flexible" way in which it had been applied by officials.

This "flexibility" was soon demonstrated in matters such as citizenship, immigration, economic ties and the high commission territories. In all of them the result was to create a situation which made it possible for South Africa to continue as a Commonwealth member in all but name as far as the United Kingdom was concerned. On "Nationality", for example, it had been decided

⁶¹ CAB 129/106, C.(61)126, "Future Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Lord Chancellor, 2 August 1961.

to treat most South Africans as "aliens" except for those with "strong British connections". The latter would be allowed to register as British citizens before a cut-off date of 31 December 1965. This was not an "Irish Solution" and it meant there was "merely a three-year extension of existing provisions of the British Nationality Act". But there would also be provisions for those South African citizens, "who through no fault of their own", failed to register by that date. The committee hoped it would be possible to persuade the South African government not to act against those who registered as British citizens by depriving them of their South African citizenship.

On economic relations the report noted that British financial and economic interests in South Africa comprised of £900m of investment and £165m of exports annually.⁶² In order to "safeguard" these interests and to keep South Africa in the sterling area the committee recommended that "we should aim at maintaining our present trade relations with South Africa as nearly as possible unchanged". The Ottawa agreements were not affected and South Africa was expected to "help us" on these negotiations "since she receives more than she gives" (in terms of preferences). If Britain were to join the EEC she would have to terminate these trade agreements with South Africa (although she "might try to obtain derogations on her behalf"). Britain had to be prepared to tell her so at an "appropriate moment".

As this would largely destroy the value of the trade agreement as a general bargaining counter we should not vouchsafe such a warning prematurely, although our decision to apply for membership of the Common Market may lead South Africa to raise the question at an early stage.

On the high commission territories, the report noted that it was much in the interests of the high commission territories for

⁶² Ibid., p.161.

Britain to retain South Africa's goodwill "by being as accommodating as possible throughout the negotiations on future relations".⁶³ The committee recommended that the aim should be to keep relations between the territories and South Africa unchanged and if possible "to improve working arrangements". In particular it was necessary to continue Part 2 of the Fugitive Offenders Act with two modifications - the exclusion of political offenders and of offenses not punishable in both South Africa and the territory concerned. Britain would also try to improve the Swazi sugar industry. It was also necessary to consider problems relating to the 1909 South Africa Act, notably Sections 151 and 150 which dealt with transfer. The committee felt the real choice lay between retaining or repealing the whole act. These issues were "at present" dormant and the repeal of the act

might stimulate the South Africans to raise them, which would in itself be undesirable. On the other hand, to retain the Act would probably arouse criticism in the Territories, the Rhodesias and Parliament.

The committee therefore recommended a "deferred decision" until the progress of the high commissioner's negotiations became more clear.

On the Commonwealth sugar agreement (CSA), the committee recommended that South Africa cease membership after the end of 1961. It would be necessary to inform South African sugar producers of the decision so that they could plan for an agreement with the International sugar conference the following month. It was recommended, however, to replace the CSA agreement with a "bilateral" one which would mean that Britain would buy the amount of sugar guaranteed to South Africa under the CSA, of 150,000 tons per annum, at present or future CSA prices,

⁶³ Ibid., p.162.

whichever was lower.⁶⁴ "We might further agree to buy not more than another 25,000 tons at world prices." The agreement would last between four to seven years. The reason for this was that it would "help us in negotiations with South Africa", particularly to safeguard the Swazi sugar industry which enjoyed a guaranteed market in South Africa and some indirect benefit from a high CSA price. It was recommended that the "assurance" be given to the Swazi that if their outlet in South Africa were reduced, the United Kingdom would ensure alternative outlets in the extent of "keeping them no worse off than previously".

All these recommendations were discussed by cabinet on 3 August and general agreement with them was noted.⁶⁵ The sugar agreement, however, was seen as a "heavy price" for Britain to pay in the hope of advantages in other areas, especially since there was "an embarrassing surplus of sugar produced in the Commonwealth and we did not need to import from South Africa". But if there was no commitment by Britain before other objectives were sure to be secured and since Britain would otherwise have to take Swazi sugar which had a guaranteed market at that time in South Africa, the agreement could be considered a "reasonably satisfactory bargain".

In September Lord Kilmuir presented cabinet with some additional and "minor" problems concerning the future relationship with the new republic of South Africa, one of which was the rate to charge the republic for press telegrams.⁶⁶ The problem was that Britain could not continue to charge the same Commonwealth rate of 1d per word "without strong protests from the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board and international press agencies". On the other hand, to switch to the foreign rate of 7d would cause

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ CAB 128/35 Part 2, C.C.(61)47, 2, 3 August 1961, pp.295-296.

⁶⁶ CAB 129/104, C.(61)143, "Future Relations with South Africa", Memorandum by the Lord Chancellor, 27 September 1961.

a sharp reduction in press traffic thus "weakening our influence on South African opinion" and British contacts with those South Africans with whom she wished to have contacts. It might also "cause friction between South Africa and the High Commission Territories" (who were still on the 1d rate) as a result of traffic for South Africa being routed through the territories. His committee therefore recommended a "compromise" rate of 4.5d but that urgent telegrams should go up to 10d which would conform with "international practice". Commonwealth rates had also been withdrawn in the cases of Burma, Israel and Jordan, he added.

Another concession recommended by Kilmuir was that South Africans should be exempt from "aliens control" until 31 December 1962 on entry to Britain which would give them much the same grace period as that enjoyed by Burma and Somaliland previously; and that there would also be no visa requirements. This would be subject to the assurance that South Africa would reciprocate. Visa provisions would then "conform with our general policy throughout the world".

These policy recommendations were, on the whole, in agreement with the recommendations that had emerged from the South African side when government departments had submitted to the interior ministry their comments on the possible consequences for South Africa of leaving the Commonwealth.⁶⁷ In terms of immigration and visa requirements, for example, the South Africans intended to keep the situation unchanged and thus were prepared to allow dual citizenship to continue and to exempt Commonwealth citizens (of the "white" Commonwealth countries) from the restrictions applying to aliens. As far as the economic preferences were concerned, most of the contractual agreements were to be continued unaltered and it was only a few of the non-contractual preferences (mostly from New Zealand) that were dependent on Commonwealth membership that were in doubt. Essential interests of an economic or political nature were to be preserved by both

⁶⁷ See pp.490-491.

sides and, for all intents and purposes, South Africa was to continue to be a Commonwealth country, in practice, if not in name, as far as the South African government and the old "white" dominions were concerned.

Diefenbaker's Canada proved to be as markedly disinclined to alter the substance of bilateral relations with South Africa as Britain had been. Peter Lyon quotes the senior external affairs adviser to Diefenbaker as saying in a letter to the Canadian high commissioner in Ghana that:

The reaction in Canada has been generally good [to South Africa's withdrawal], although there is still some controversy over whether the Government should follow up by supporting such things as economic sanctions against South Africa. There is no sign at all that the Government is willing to do this. The Prime Minister's attitude is that we have gone far enough in showing what we think of South Africa's racial policy, and that economic sanctions, apart from being ineffectual, would be harmful to Canada since the trade balance is strongly favourable to us.⁶⁸

Towards the end of May 1961, as South Africa's republican status outside the Commonwealth approached, the Canadian cabinet decided that no change would be made in Canadian policies on the export of arms, the existing preferential trade arrangements, or on immigration. Diefenbaker did not demur with these decisions although he expressed some embarrassment over the publicity given to the continued trade preferences and also wondered whether enough thought had been devoted by his government to some of the possible consequences of South Africa's withdrawal.⁶⁹ Much the same could be said for the governments of Australia and New Zealand. It was left to the anti-apartheid movements in the old

⁶⁸ Lyon, "Changing Commonwealth Policies", p.38.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.38-39.

Commonwealth and to the Afro-Asian countries to take up the campaign for the total isolation of South Africa after 1961.

(c) Verwoerd and the high commission territories - the Commonwealth connection.

Reference has been made throughout the above account of South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth to the high commission territories and their role in negotiations and discussions between Britain and South Africa prior to and immediately after the 1961 Commonwealth conference. It is necessary to fill in a few gaps in the narrative by taking up some aspects of South African and British policy towards the high commission territories from the end of Strijdom's period and bringing it up to 1961.

It was noted at the end of the last section (Part 3: the Strijdom Years) that Verwoerd was moving towards the position of seeing the protectorates as eventually falling into the grand plan of the homelands system and as being part of a Commonwealth of South African states which was partly envisaged by the Promotion of (Bantu) Self Government Act of 1959.⁷⁰ As plans for the advancement of the homelands continued, "the British territories became associated in Pretoria's eyes with its bantustan policy".⁷¹ Verwoerd denied that he had ever said that the protectorates were important to apartheid or to the expansion of the bantustans scheme but he had often added that it would be in the interests of the inhabitants to join in.⁷²

In the aftermath of withdrawal from the Commonwealth, he said the British policy of granting the protectorates separate constitutions had "killed" the idea of them joining the Homelands

⁷⁰ See page 267.

⁷¹ Barber and Barratt, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p.95.

⁷² Hyam, The Failure of South African Expansion, p.194 and Digest of South African Affairs, Vol 8, No.8, 14 April 1961, p.5.

system.⁷³ This, however, did not end his campaign to try and get Britain to hand them over. In 1963, two years after leaving the Commonwealth, Verwoerd suggested they become bantustans under South African guidance and that they would thus achieve quicker prosperity than if they were on their own.⁷⁴

However, as Hyam notes, the departure of South Africa from the Commonwealth meant the issue of transfer had "fizzled out with a whimper". The "bang" had been in 1948 but now that the South Africa Act had lapsed legally the clause on transfer in the Schedule "no longer held good" as South Africa was now a foreign country.⁷⁵ Verwoerd, "being a practical man" realised this but still maintained an interest in the territories from the strategic, economic and political viewpoint, especially in the matter of refugees from South Africa. Hence his attempt to persuade Britain in 1963.

Nevertheless the years 1958 to 1961 saw much speculation in the press and also in the ranks of British officialdom about Verwoerd's intentions concerning the protectorates and it is clear that the issue was at the forefront of British thinking when it came to policy concerning the republic and South Africa's Commonwealth membership. John Maud as high commissioner was responsible for the administration of the territories and was as concerned as his predecessors had been about the implications of British policy towards the Union and its effect, in turn, on South Africa's relations with the territories. A "softly, softly" approach to South Africa's republican ambitions was as much dictated by these considerations as by the more general economic and strategic factors.

The years after 1959, as part of the general decolonisation moves

⁷³ Digest of South African Affairs, Vol.8, No.8, 14 April 1961, p.5.

⁷⁴ Hyam, Failure, p.196.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

by the British, saw a somewhat belated effort to grasp for a more tangible positive political assertion of Britain's remaining responsibilities in southern Africa. The thrust of British policy towards the territories now became one of bringing them to self-government as a more or less conscious attempt to prevent them falling into apartheid hands.⁷⁶ At the same time, however, the South African government under Verwoerd was still thinking of transfer, not only for reasons of national prestige but because of the need to have a uniform bantu policy for the whole area. The territories were now seen to be a natural complement to the homelands system. The issue was made more urgent for both sides by the flight of political refugees, particularly after Sharpeville, and South Africa's attempts to have the British authorities co-operate in their return. This created considerable embarrassment for the British government and helped to keep the territories "on the boil" as a highly public issue in South Africa and Britain.

In November of 1958 a minor political storm had erupted over Verwoerd's oblique threat of economic warfare against the protectorates if South Africa failed to get her way. The British had responded that they would find the means to retaliate if such threats were carried out.⁷⁷ Verwoerd had reportedly stated that in certain circumstances the Union might not "continue to take the surplus inhabitants of the protectorates".

The Rand Daily Mail reported on 14 November that the Transvaal Congress of the NP had called on the government to do "everything possible" to ensure the protectorates did not become estranged from the Union because that would hamper the application of apartheid in the Union.⁷⁸ However, as the Rand Daily Mail pointed out, Verwoerd's statement to the party congress that the protectorates would be freer and more prosperous under his rule

⁷⁶ Hyam, Failure, p.195.

⁷⁷ Sunday Times, 17 November 1958.

⁷⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 14 November 1959.

than under British rule was "unlikely" to make an impression on the average inhabitant of the territories who was "not by any means ignorant of the difference between his status and that of the African in the Union".

In February 1959 it was reported that the minister of bantu administration had said in the Senate that "when" the territories were incorporated the Africans would occupy half the land area of the Union.⁷⁹ This, claimed the Rand Daily Mail was a "remarkably frank indication that the Government's apartheid policy depends on the incorporation of the Protectorates". South Africa's chances of incorporation were, however, "close to vanishing point".

In June 1959 the Sunday Times in Johannesburg reported that the British had once again rebuffed South African overtures for transfer. South Africa had been informed, claimed the newspaper, that Britain was no longer prepared to discuss transfer and that South Africa had been asked not to raise the question again.⁸⁰ South Africa had deferred to this request and had abandoned the subject but would raise it again at a more propitious time. Verwoerd and Louw knew the depth of feeling in London about the issue and "appreciated the difficulties of the British government".

In October it was predicted by South Africa magazine that Verwoerd would raise the matter of the protectorates in his talks with Macmillan in February 1960 and that he would press Macmillan to allow them to join a Commonwealth of South African states (Bantustans) because he knew already "the impossibility of transfer".⁸¹ As we saw in a previous chapter, the discussions in Cape Town did include some mention of the territories by Verwoerd and Macmillan and that Macmillan had refused to take note of any

⁷⁹ Rand Daily Mail, 9 February 1959.

⁸⁰ Sunday Times, 14 June 1959.

⁸¹ South Africa (London), 28 November 1959.

protests by the Union concerning the policy of granting self-government by Britain for the territories.⁸²

In the meantime the Nationalists had been sounding out white opinion in the protectorates as a possible pressure tactic to use in negotiations. The Verwoerd collection in Bloemfontein reveals some correspondence between South African officials and white settlers in the territories which could be construed as attempts by South Africa to use these settlers as political "Trojan horses" concerning incorporation. A letter from Verwoerd's secretary, J.F. Barnard, to a B.J. Wartington of Francistown in Bechuanaland in 1958 assured him, for example, that the areas given over to whites in Bechuanaland in the Tati and Tuli blocks would remain under white control "when the protectorates are incorporated" ("wanneer die Protektorate ingelyf word").⁸³

Verwoerd also corresponded with a certain Jan van Wyk de Vries of Linden Johannesburg who claimed to be an adviser of the Swazi King Sobhuza II and who promised to help Verwoerd with "short reports" on developments in Swaziland which he would keep "confidential".⁸⁴ De Vries was of the opinion that Sobhuza was dissatisfied with British control and that there was a "strong element" in favour of "toenadering" with South Africa. Verwoerd had also promised to take up the case of the Tuli Block farmers in Bechuanaland who wanted to declare independence and then join the Union. He told the lawyers acting for these farmers that he would try to present their case to Macmillan when he arrived.⁸⁵ However, in a reply to a Dominee D.S. Malan of Mafeking who suggested action by the Union to incorporate Bechuanaland because

⁸² See p.355.

⁸³ INCH, PV93 (Verwoerd Collection), File 1/42/1/4 (Protectorates: General, 1951-1960), Letter from J.F.Barnard to B.J.Wartington, 12 December 1958.

⁸⁴ Ibid., J. Van Wyk de Vries - Verwoerd, 21 January 1959.

⁸⁵ Ibid., J.F. Barnard - Wessels en Le Roux, Prokureurs, 16 January 1960.

of white dissatisfaction there with British rule, Verwoerd replied that any attempt at annexation by South Africa would mean "war" with Britain but that possibly the Tuli Block areas could be "exchanged for some Black areas".⁸⁶

The refugee question became of heightened importance during 1959 when rumours of ANC-planned demonstrations, to coincide with 26 June (Freedom Charter day) and the consequent police crackdown, spread. A letter from the resident commissioner in Mbabane, Swaziland, to the deputy high commissioner in Cape Town indicated police reports of possible "serious disturbances" on the Swazi border and he asked for advice concerning refugees fleeing into Swaziland.⁸⁷ A memorandum drawn up by the high commissioner surmised that such rumours might have been deliberately planted by the Union police to "provoke incidents" such as the banning of the "notoriously moderate ex-Chief Luthuli" which would make it easier for the ANC "hot-heads" to get their way and facilitate the task of the South African Police.⁸⁸ He stated, further, that methods to stop refugees would be "unpopular" in the territories and in Britain and so it would be better, rather, to

endeavour to keep tabs on any refugees who might enter the territories, and we should, of course have to surrender any to the Union after the Union Authorities had complied with all the legal requirements prescribed by the Fugitives Offenders Act.

In 1960, after Sharpeville, the danger of incidents between the Union authorities and the high commission territories intensified. Many protectorate citizens were caught up in the unrest that resulted from the Sharpeville incident and the

⁸⁶ Ibid., Verwoerd - Ds D.F. Malan, 27 January 1960.

⁸⁷ PRO, DO 119, File 1200 (1959: Native Affairs, the ANC), No.2, Resident Commissioner, Mbabane - Deputy High Commissioner, Cape Town, 30 May 1959.

⁸⁸ Ibid., No.2, Memorandum from the High Commissioner, 2 June 1959.

consequent declaration of a state of emergency and this caused flurries of alarm in the high commission and in London. On 4 April Maud told Douglas-Home, the Commonwealth secretary, of his letter to Jooste, the Union secretary of external affairs, asking for names of protectorate citizens arrested, killed or wounded in the disturbances in the Union.⁸⁹ He had had no reply yet and Verwoerd's "excuse" for the delay was that many were not carrying passes and so could not be identified or were posing as Union nationals so as to get jobs.

Maud had pointed out there would be a "bad impression" in Britain if the British authorities were not informed quickly and if there were a refusal of access to detainees. The high commission instructed attorneys on its behalf to hold a watching brief over the judicial enquiry instituted after Sharpeville. By 14 April the high commission was reporting the names of refugees from South Africa to the territories back to London and was requesting security clearance for these refugees from the Special Branch. It was noted, for example, that A.H.A. Selby, one of the applicants for residence in Bechuanaland, was a "prominent South African Communist deemed in 1959 to be a prohibited immigrant in Basutoland".⁹⁰

Questions had already been asked in the British parliament on the refugee question. On 11 April the Commonwealth secretary reported to Maud that a Labour Party spokesman had asked in parliament recently whether the same principles as existed in Britain applied to political refugees in the high commission territories.⁹¹ The minister of state, Alport, had referred the reply to the home secretary who said that colonial governments were sure "to be guided by the same humanitarian considerations which guide HMG in the United Kingdom". When pressed further, he

⁸⁹ DO 119, File 1464 (Union of South Africa: Riots and Unrest, 1959-60), No.8, Maud - Home, 4 April 1960.

⁹⁰ Ibid., No.80, Maud - Home, 14 April 1960.

⁹¹ Ibid., No.57A, Home - Maud, 11 April 1960.

had stated that it was a "complicated question" in which "special considerations apply".

In May Maud telexed Maseru to say that it was

in Basutoland's interest that the Territory should not be used as a base for political activity in Union and we must put ourselves in a position to assure Union Government accordingly; otherwise Basutoland risks retaliation.⁹²

He asked whether the paramount chief and the executive council in Basutoland would support arrangements whereby applicants for residence were required to "abstain from political activity" and that this should apply "even before a resident permit becomes necessary".

During cabinet discussions in London on 1 April 1960 concerning the UNO resolution against South Africa over Sharpeville one of the reasons advanced for the British abstention on the vote was the need to "bring discussions in the Security Council to an end as soon as possible". This was because, if prolonged: "Native leaders" would be likely to be asked to "give evidence" and this was "particularly undesirable" because "certain African leaders had taken refuge in Bechuanaland".⁹³ Britain had "discreetly intimated" to the South African government that it would be preferable for them to refrain from demanding the return of refugees but, nevertheless, if the demand was made, it would be possible to delay action on "technical grounds".

On 5 April it was noted that the return of refugees could be "lawfully demanded" by South Africa and that there was no right

⁹² File 1465 (Union of South Africa: Riots and Unrest), No. 29, Maud - Resident Commissioner, Maseru, 1 May 1960.

⁹³ PRO, CAB128/34, C.C.(60)22, 3 (Ecuadorean Resolution: UK to Abstain), 1 April 1960.

of political asylum in the high commission territories.⁹⁴ It was not certain that local courts could accept the argument that refusal to return them was based on the grounds that they would be personally imperilled. If, therefore, there were any sign that South Africa wanted them "the best course might be to transfer them to this country [Britain]", although the fact that they had no British passports might "cause difficulties". If the South Africans were to demand their return the answer should be that there were delays on the appeal by local courts or "another technical procedure". The cabinet then authorised the lord chancellor, in consultation with the home secretary, to consider how the demand for the return of "African leaders" who took refuge in Bechuanaland "could best be resisted".

On 26 May Lord Home outlined the position again noting that "some refugees were Communist Party members".⁹⁵ Some wished to leave the territories and this would involve their transit through the Central African Federation. The Federation government would not require passports and was willing to accept travel documents from the high commissioner on behalf of the United Kingdom, though "not documents issued by the Government of Ghana" to which some refugees wished to travel. The issue of travel documents on a large scale would

almost certainly provoke the Government of the Union to retaliate against the Territories or to seek to recover the refugees under the Fugitive Offenders Act, 1881.

(Under this act, Home explained, the Union Government could issue warrants of arrest of any fugitive for any offence including political offenses and a magistrate in the territories could not

⁹⁴ C.C.(60)24, 4 (Arrest of UK Citizens: Statement to be made), 5 April 1960.

⁹⁵ C.C.(60)33, 5 (SA Refugees in High Commission Territories: Proposals approved), 26 May 1960.

refuse to return them "unless, in all the circumstances of the case, that would seem unjust or oppressive"). But "public opinion in Britain would be hostile" to a total refusal to issue them travel documents and then there was some reason to think South Africa would not object to the issue of a limited number over a period of time. Meanwhile "private arrangements" were under way by a "citizen of Ghana" to transport some refugees by charter plane direct to the Belgian Congo without landing in the Federation. This was likely to be "unwelcome" to the Union and "an attempt should be made to persuade the prime minister of Ghana to prevent its recurrence".

The discussion that followed showed general support for the Commonwealth secretary's proposals. In the meantime he was asked to try and dissuade the Union government from proceeding against any fugitives under the act but, if it were impossible to do so, delays in the operation of the act could be secured by appeals to the privy council. An amendment to the 1913 order-in-council would meanwhile be prepared so as to exclude political offenses from the scope of the relevant part of the act. But the amendment would not be made, nor the government's intent announced unless the Union actually invoked the act.

As we have seen, the discussions between Eric Louw and Macmillan in September of that year and between Louw and Alport, minister of state for Commonwealth relations, seemed to have resulted in a temporary respite for the British concerning the refugee problem.⁹⁶ Louw, in the context of general discussions concerning the boycott movement in African countries, agreed to allow the exodus of refugees in flights over South African territory and promised not to demand the return of any to South Africa. It is clear, however, that Britain was not prepared to confront South Africa on the issue and, once again, this related to the general context of appeasement of South Africa in order to keep relations on an even keel and to ensure that she remained in the

⁹⁶ DO 119, File 1206, No. 93, Home - Maud, 9 September 1960.

Commonwealth.

Anti-government opinion in Britain continued to press the Tories not to give in on the protectorates, especially after South Africa had withdrawn from the Commonwealth. The Guardian said on the day after South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth that the British record was "badly stained" in Nyasaland and in the two Rhodesias but Britain should now resolve to "keep it absolutely clean" in the protectorates, no matter what the cost. "The Nationalists will not last forever."⁹⁷

An article by the academic, Peter Calvocoressi, in the Northern Echo (Darlington, UK) of 30 May 1961 predicted more embarrassment for Britain, not less, now that South Africa had withdrawn from the Commonwealth because of the "tensions and disturbances" likely to continue in that country.⁹⁸ The high commission territories remained British responsibilities and could become the bases for "revolution" against South Africa. "What does a British Government do then?"

An example of how concerned Britain remained not to antagonise South Africa over the high commission territories, even after withdrawal from the Commonwealth, was soon provided. In June 1961 the United Nations decided to send an investigative committee, the Fabregat Committee, to South West Africa to investigate charges that South Africa was applying apartheid policies in the territory contrary to the spirit of the mandate. The committee requested permission from Britain to enter via Bechuanaland and to visit some South West African exiles there. The British cabinet discussed the request on 6 July and came to the conclusion that the visa would have to be refused because the committee refused to undertake that it would not try and enter South West Africa without South African permission.⁹⁹ In

⁹⁷ Guardian, 17 March 1961.

⁹⁸ Northern Echo (Darlington), 30 May 1961.

⁹⁹ PRO, CAB 128/35 Part 2, C.C.(61)39,8, p.245.

discussion it was recognised by cabinet that to refuse facilities would give rise to hostile criticism in UNO but that "great difficulties" would arise with the South African government if Britain allowed the committee to enter South West Africa "from a territory for which we were responsible". It was advised that the UN should be told that any such attempt would result in "incidents" on the Bechuanaland/South West African frontier and that this "would not be in the interests of the people of Bechuanaland for whom we are responsible".

What the protectorates issue had demonstrated, therefore, was the undiminished desire of the British to retain the relationship with South Africa on an even keel, even after South Africa had officially left the Commonwealth. The fact that Britain later led the territories towards independence in no way lessened their dependence on South Africa economically and politically and, in fact, merely provided Britain a convenient pretext for avoiding the responsibility of giving them the necessary support to keep them out of South Africa's clutches. In the long-term it would become increasingly clear that on this issue and on economic and strategic issues in general, leaving the Commonwealth did not, as far as Britain was concerned, alter the relationship with South Africa's Nationalist government to any significant extent.

CONCLUSION

South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in May 1961 symbolised the end of an association with Britain, the monarchy and the empire that had begun with the British take-over of the Cape in 1795. It was the psychological and emotional significance of this sudden end to some 165 years of history that had struck Harold Macmillan so much in the aftermath of the London conference and which had been so eloquently expressed by him in his memoirs and his speeches to the British parliament. However much the British and South African publics had been prepared for the eventuality of a break by the preceding twelve years of conflict with the international community over race policy, the unexpected suddenness of the decision to withdraw had been a shock to those who supported the British connection. To the Afrikaner Nationalist supporters of Verwoerd, however, it had been more of an unexpected relief than a shock - a feeling of receiving a "double bonus", the restoration of the republic and the end of association with the detested British Empire. For them it marked the completion of the full circle of history since 1902 - the return of an inheritance taken away from them by the British during the South African War at the end of the last century. It meant, also, the beginning of a new cycle of history as an independent nation. Any anxieties over the new nation's isolation and diminishing international legitimacy were dispelled by the euphoria of achieving republican independence. The cost of isolation and ostracism would only be felt much later.

The black majority, as we have seen, was never consulted and its opinions never heeded by the Nationalist government concerning the decision to establish a republic outside the Commonwealth. This was nothing out of the ordinary considering the context of the previous 300 years of European conquest and subjugation and at least one of the liberation movements fighting white rule felt it to entirely consistent with this history. The Pan Africanist Congress dismissed the republic as just another change in the form of white rule but welcomed exclusion from the Commonwealth as a blow to the legitimacy of the white state. The largest African nationalist movement, however, expressed its distress at

the formation of a "fascist and racist" republic and actively tried to prevent its implementation. The ANC also, however, welcomed the exclusion from the Commonwealth as marking one of the first steps towards the achievement of international isolation of the apartheid regime.

The manner in which Britain and the white dominions had negotiated the continuance of economic and political ties with the South African regime after withdrawal attracted considerable criticism from the anti-apartheid forces in South Africa and overseas. It seemed to confirm what had been suspected since the Seretse affair of 1949-52, that Britain was more concerned with appeasement of the Afrikaner Nationalist government than with retaining the residual loyalty and respect of the black majority in South Africa. This was a constant theme in the rhetoric of African and Indian organisations after 1948 and it persisted to some extent even after 1961. The history of black disillusionment with Britain and the realisation that appeals to the former colonial power were falling on deaf ears is a constant sub-text in the chronicle of the rise of African nationalism in South Africa. By 1961 what little sentimental attachment was left for the British monarchy in the ranks of the African majority was expressed in terms of memories of a previous era - an era in which a modicum of non-racial liberalism had existed under Queen Victoria, sometimes referred to even in African nationalist circles as "Victoria, the Good".

Nevertheless, the foreign policy of the Congress Alliance had shifted considerably by 1961 in comparison with the days when Dr A.B. Xuma had led an organisation which, while committed to the establishment of a non-racial democracy, was still wedded to "constitutional" forms of protest. The increasing influence of the Youth League in the executive organs of the ANC and the adoption after 1949 of a more radical political programme of action against white rule was mirrored in the realm of foreign policy by a more militant anti-colonial stance and an inclination in favour of the socialist, non-aligned movement in world affairs. Inevitably Britain and the white Commonwealth countries were to be judged increasingly in terms of their willingness to

condemn apartheid, white rule and the perpetuation of colonial rule in Africa. When it became clear that these countries were not, with the possible exception of Canada, prepared to force the South African government to change its policies, the extra-parliamentary opposition called for South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth as the first step towards the total isolation of the apartheid regime. 1961, therefore, represented one of the first significant (although largely symbolic) foreign policy victories for African nationalism in South Africa. There was no illusion about the difficulties that lay ahead in terms of persuading Western nations to follow up this first action with other more tangible economic and political moves against South Africa.

The history of South Africa's association with the British Commonwealth between the end of the Second World War and 1961 was, as we have seen, one of increasing tension over racial policy and it involved an increasing tendency, inside South Africa, to question the very basis and value of Commonwealth membership. The Smuts government after the war was confronted with the "Indian Question" in the United Nations and with the refusal of the United Nations to allow South West Africa to be annexed by South Africa. In the Commonwealth context this had not yet begun to be discussed officially but a considerable amount of bilateral diplomacy between Britain and South Africa, not to mention India and South Africa, took place concerning these issues and public opinion in the Commonwealth had begun to note the effect of South Africa's race policies on the future development of the organization.

In South Africa a gradual rethinking of the Commonwealth relationship had not just been confined to Afrikaner Nationalists and those hostile to the British connection but was something expressed by many of those for whom Commonwealth membership had been axiomatic in the past. Whether it was expressed by Nationalist politicians in the context of dissatisfaction with South African economic aid to Britain after the war or by English-speaking businessmen concerned about the effects of preferences on trade outside the Commonwealth, there was one

aspect in common - the realisation that the Commonwealth no longer provided for all of South Africa's needs and aspirations, whether in terms of exports and import requirements or in terms of defence alliances. This had, as we have seen, already been noted in the period of General Smuts's post-war premiership, in the context of the gold loan of 1947 (which had demonstrated how post-war aid to Britain aroused resentments from business interests not necessarily associated with the Nationalist Party) and in defence discussions that Smuts held with the British.

It was all a function of the decline in British power and influence after the war and was a thing felt, to an even greater extent, by the other dominions. Australia and Canada had already turned towards the United States for their effective national security during the Second World War and the signing of alliances outside the Commonwealth ambit (NATO, ANZUS and SEATO) had formalised for some countries the fact that the Commonwealth had ceased to exist as a self-sufficient defence system. The Suez crisis of 1956 had been the watershed in this decline of the Commonwealth as a cohesive military system and it had demonstrated all too clearly the limits to British power in the post-war world.

What was ironic, as we have seen, in the context of declining Commonwealth defence links, was the extent to which South Africa had tried to achieve a military alliance with Britain in the mid-fifties. This was a function of South Africa's growing fear of isolation at a time of Cold War tensions and awareness of African nationalist stirrings to the north of her borders. The failure of what one writer has called the "White Entente" in the late fifties¹ was as much a result of a lack of commitment by both the British and South African governments to make it work as a military alliance as it was a result of the general context provided by declining British power in Africa and the Middle East and, of course, South Africa's race policies.

¹ Berridge, "The Rise and Fall of the White Entente", pp.183-188.

The Commonwealth had also ceased to operate as a closed economic system during the late 1940's and the value of economic preferences had declined considerably compared to pre-war years. Nevertheless, the debate over the possible economic effects of leaving the Commonwealth was particularly strong in the years 1958 to 1961 and the danger of a loss of trade and investment was played upon with considerable skill by the official opposition party.

Britain was South Africa's biggest trading partner and took 28.1% of her exports in 1960. 48.2% of her exports went to all the Commonwealth countries together.² But less than 50% of her exports to Britain qualified for preference (excluding uranium) and so the macro-effect on the South African economy was not likely to be great if they were lost. The micro-effect for certain industries, however, was important - especially wine and fruit. Ultimately, however, South Africa's withdrawal did not have much effect economically.³ She lost a few unimportant preferences in New Zealand and certain privileges in the Commonwealth sugar agreement. The bilateral economic agreements continued because they were outside the Commonwealth ambit. They could be ended in most cases with six month's notice by either side although there were some non-contractual preferences that could be ended at anytime without notice. Nevertheless the various export industries had been taking steps since the fifties to diversify their markets and prepare for greater competition. Nationalist government policy had also taken this into account.

It was more the tendency to formation of economic blocs in Europe and elsewhere in the world that was to have an adverse effect on South Africa's exports during the sixties and seventies, despite GATT and its attempts to lower tariffs world-wide. Leaving the Commonwealth made the debate on future options for the country more urgent although the preferences in the British market did

² Kapp, "Suid-Afrika en die EEG", p.91.

³ Ibid., p.91.

not lapse. She had to prepare for that eventuality, however.⁴

The political effect of South Africa's economic link with the Commonwealth and with Britain in particular, was a constant factor in South Africa's Commonwealth relations. The importance of economic links was a constant sub-text of the relationship between the Union and Britain and played a crucial role in determining the policy of successive British governments towards South Africa and in forming its response to the growing moves towards republican independence in South Africa. Whether it was Clement Attlee's Labour government, worried about South Africa's continued co-operation in terms of gold and uranium supplies or Macmillan's Tory government worried about British investments and retaining South Africa in the sterling area, the basic principles of their respective policies towards the Union were identical. The overriding priority was to maintain important economic, political and military ties by keeping South Africa in the Commonwealth and by preventing any major rupture in the relationship over racial policy or over any other potentially disruptive issue.

The incorporation of the high commission territories by South Africa was one such potentially disruptive issue that formed a constant background irritant in the relationship between the two countries. It was largely a symbolic battle that transcended economic or strategic considerations and that involved issues of national prestige and honour. South African governments felt the existence of such territories within or adjacent to South Africa's borders to be an affront to national dignity, and, later, as potential "Trojan horses" against apartheid. Even Smuts's United Party government had declared its intention to incorporate the territories, although its approach to the British was less confrontational than that of the Nationalists after 1948.

British governments, on the other hand, felt it to be impolitic to defy African and world opinion (not to mention strong liberal opinion in Britain itself), by handing the territories over to

⁴ Ibid., p.91.

South Africa. This did not stop them, however, from constantly holding out the possibility of eventual transfer and from granting the South Africans political and military concessions in the territories in return for South African co-operation on broader Commonwealth issues.

The need for South African co-operation in the Commonwealth meant in practice that Britain had to make frequent and ongoing efforts to placate South Africa by supporting her in the United Nations or by allowing her, up to a certain point, to dictate British policy in a whole host of areas. Whether it was the Simonstown Agreement and British concessions concerning Middle Eastern defence or the matter of South African military access to the high commission territories, or British reluctance to move too fast on admitting former African colonies into the Commonwealth, the underlying rationale was always the same - the need not to antagonise South Africa too much in case she decided to leave the Commonwealth or in case she ceased to co-operate in important areas of British economic and strategic policy.

This sort of reasoning applied up to and beyond the republican referendum. The stated British reason for deciding to stay neutral during the republican campaign was the need not to be seen to be influencing the result - which could be taken as undue interference in South Africa's affairs. That was also the stated reason for not giving public approval of South Africa's republican application at the May 1960 Commonwealth conference, before the referendum had taken place. We know, however, that the CRO had already factored into its assessment of the South African situation the foregone conclusion that the referendum results would be in favour of a republic and that there would not be much difference in practice to British-South African economic relations thereafter as long as the Nationalists could be persuaded to maintain those relations intact. That could best be achieved if South Africa remained in the Commonwealth and Macmillan's government had already made up its mind that it would do everything it could to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth after the referendum.

Whether South Africa was to remain a monarchy or to become a republic, British policy was constant in its determination to keep South Africa in the Commonwealth. Macmillan had informed Louw at the 1960 conference that Britain would unreservedly support South Africa's continued Commonwealth membership as a monarchy but before that he had given signals to Verwoerd (during his Cape Town visit) that even as a republic South Africa could expect British support to stay in the Commonwealth. The fears concerning the reactions of the Afro-Asian prime ministers prompted him to advise Verwoerd after the May conference that he should postpone the referendum until the atmosphere was calmer. Verwoerd was also advised that he could not claim that British support for the republican application was guaranteed.

But once the results of the referendum were known Macmillan lost no time in writing to Menzies and to the other premiers to persuade them to agree to South Africa's membership as a republic. He and Menzies devised the scheme to separate the constitutional and racial debates in order to increase the chances of South Africa's acceptance at the 1961 conference. It is a measure of his persuasive powers or perhaps of the moderation of the other premiers that most of them, including Nehru and Nkrumah, had indicated a measure of agreement with these tactics before the conference began. It was only under the pressure of circumstances (public opinion in Britain had been building up against South Africa ever since Sharpeville and this played a part in influencing the demands of some prime ministers for concessions from South Africa) that these tactics failed. Verwoerd's continued refusal to countenance any talk of reform in his apartheid policies virtually doomed the discussions from an early stage. Macmillan, who admitted in his memoirs that he had known even before the conference began that there was little hope of any concession from the South African prime minister (and who had not been prepared to apply any meaningful pressure on Verwoerd to change his policies), then advised Verwoerd to withdraw South Africa's application.

Macmillan had already been assured of South Africa's desires and intentions concerning the maintenance of the economic

relationship with Britain if the Commonwealth connection were to be terminated. Verwoerd had indicated that Britain would be regarded as a "friend" even if South Africa were outside the Commonwealth and Louw had even threatened that if a bilateral trade agreement were not to be signed by Britain, South Africa could withhold gold and mineral sales. The extent to which this threat may have influenced Macmillan's whole approach during and after the 1961 conference is of course a matter of pure conjecture. Nevertheless the result was the conclusion of bilateral economic, military and social agreements with South Africa that preserved her as a member of the "old" Commonwealth in substance if not in name for many years to come.

It has been pointed out that South Africa was a product of the "old" Commonwealth, not the "new" and that therefore the change in the nature of the organisation with its acquisition of new members was the "perfect pretext" for South Africa to leave.⁵ It also meant that there was not much "trauma" when she left. As far as Nationalist foreign policy was concerned, it meant greater freedom of action in the following years to pursue the "Outward Policy" and to react to the Rhodesian crisis in their own way - actions that would have been difficult in the Commonwealth context. But the "darker" side for South Africa was the "denial of legitimacy" which leaving the Commonwealth meant, and the increasing focus on the need for South Africa to change its national identity because of its racial policies. "The importance of the retirement-under-pressure of South Africa from the Commonwealth was that it was the first aggressive enforcement of this doctrine [denial of sovereignty because of questioned legitimacy]".⁶

It was after the Second World War that South Africa experienced this crisis of legitimacy.⁷ It was mainly a result of the

⁵ C. Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.420.

⁶ Ibid., p.425.

⁷ Jack Spence, "South Africa and the Modern World", in Wilson and Thompson (eds), Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.2, pp.525-526.

challenge provided by the newly decolonised states of Africa and Asia to the traditional "sanctity of domestic jurisdiction" and "to the claim of the South African state to speak for the majority within its borders". The revolutionary ideology of anti-colonialism (which included apartheid South Africa in its definition of a colonial society) forced South Africa onto the defensive.

Thus increasingly after 1948 South African foreign policy was primarily concerned with defending domestic policy and by implication the very structure of South African society and the values underpinning it.⁸

Notwithstanding the massive challenge to the state's legitimacy (and to the national identity provided by the constant questioning of the basic unity of South African society)⁹, the Nationalist government had, by 1961, successfully defended its sovereignty and its ability to exercise effective authority within its borders. This was primarily a function of its economic and military strength bolstered, in no small measure, by the degree of protection South Africa received in the United Nations and in the Commonwealth forum from its old Commonwealth partner, Britain, and from its main Western trading partners. It was these factors that for some three decades after South Africa left the Commonwealth prevented the twin crises of national identity and government legitimacy from becoming a crisis of sovereignty or, in other words, from becoming a real threat to the ability of the South African state to maintain its internal and external authority.

⁸ Ibid., p.526.

⁹ Vale, "The Internationalisation of Apartheid", p.423.

EPILOGUE: The Prodigal Returns

On 1 June 1994 South Africa returned to the Commonwealth after an absence of some thirty-three years. The context was provided by the holding of South Africa's first truly democratic election in its history just six weeks prior to this. With an ANC government in power, and apartheid finally defeated, the promise of a return to the Commonwealth family was fulfilled. The ANC had for many years declared its intention to do so and had claimed that South Africa, in theory if not in fact, had never left the Commonwealth because the black majority had never been asked about it.¹ In his speech which marked the return at a ceremony in London on 20 July 1994, South Africa's deputy president, Thabo Mbeki, thanked the other nations of the Commonwealth and Queen Elizabeth as the head of the organisation for all the help given to the struggle for democracy in South Africa.² A service held in Westminster Abbey was attended by over two thousand dignitaries including the royal family. The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, proclaimed the return of the "prodigal" and readings were delivered from Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country and Oswald Mtshali's poem, "Love".

The attitude of the vast majority of South Africans to South Africa's return was shown by editorials in The Sowetan, the (heir to the World) which has one of the largest daily readerships in the country. The Sowetan claimed that South Africa was no longer a "pariah nation"³ and that after having been "out in the cold" for thirty-three years, she was now "back in the fold" like an "errant child" rejoining its family.⁴ The Commonwealth had carried out a "tireless campaign" for a free South Africa and Chief Ameka Anyaoku had welcomed the country

¹ Oliver Tambo, the President of the ANC, had said this in a speech to the Royal Commonwealth Society in London in the late 1980s. (Reported in The Star, 2 June 1994).

² Business Day, 21 July 1994.

³ Sowetan, 3 June 1994.

⁴ Sowetan, 22 July 1994.

back with the words:

The return of a non-racial, democratic South Africa, working alongside the other fifty members of the Commonwealth is a boost for the association, not least in the task of making the world safe for diversity.⁵

The editorial went on to rebut the "sceptics" concerning the role of the Commonwealth now that South Africa was back. The "informality" and "flexibility" of the organisation was praised as a "strength", not a drawback, and it quoted Anyaoku as saying that the Commonwealth was able to cross the "fine line" of non-interference in the affairs of its members and had in fact "set the pace" in that regard.

There would now be a "mutually beneficial" relationship with Pretoria. The Commonwealth would be able to give its expertise in developing social and economic programmes for South Africa and South Africa in return "had much to give its Commonwealth neighbours". Anyaoku saw the Commonwealth as a "microcosm" of the UNO without the "rigid structure". The return of South Africa, he said, marked a "new beginning" for the Commonwealth.

The attitude of the large, mainly "white" English-language dailies, such as The Star and Business Day, was far more muted and understated than that of the Sowetan. This, perhaps, reflected the fact that thirty-three years of Nationalist rule had eroded white English-speaking support for the Commonwealth to the point where an attitude of indifference, if not active hostility, prevailed. A consensus had been reached as early as 1961 between the English and Afrikaans communities on racial issues and on what they perceived to be an external threat to their way of life posed by organisations such as the UNO and the Commonwealth itself. This feeling had intensified during the turbulent '70s and '80s and the Commonwealth had come to represent, for many, the Afro-Asian onslaught against South Africa. By then, of course, the Commonwealth had expanded to the

⁵ Ibid.

point where the old "white" dominions were hugely outnumbered by newly independent African, Asian and Caribbean nations. The fact that Conservative governments in Britain had demonstrated their (tacit) support for white South Africa was of little consolation in this regard.

The Business Day simply reported, the day after South Africa officially joined, government and foreign affairs department "sources" as saying that readmittance to the Commonwealth was just "symbolic", nothing more.⁶ The Commonwealth was just a "club". South Africa would have to contribute R1,8m annually as a subscription to the secretariat and would also be expected to contribute between R10m and R15m to Commonwealth assistance programmes. However, it was admitted that South Africa would "get out more" than it puts in to the Commonwealth, for example, the R2,5m received from Commonwealth funds to help with the recent general elections. South Africa would also be sending a team of sportsmen and women to the Commonwealth Games in Canada.

On 2 June, the day after South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth, The Star ran an editorial entitled "Back where we belong" which stated that "South Africa may feel more at home in the new-style Commonwealth than the old".⁷

It is one of history's little ironies that those most vocal in bewailing South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth in 1961 are now the most lukewarm about our readmission. The reason probably has to do with Britain's reduced role and the Third World's much increased influence in Commonwealth affairs.

It noted that Queen Elizabeth remained one of the most enthusiastic proponents of the Commonwealth ideal and that the organisation was much more "broadly based" than it was thirty years previously. Then there were only ten members, now more than

⁶ Business Day, 2 June 1994.

⁷ The Star, 2 June 1994.

fifty, many of them "developing countries" with problems "similar to our own". "This suggests that South Africa might feel more at home in the new Commonwealth than it ever did in the old". Membership "no longer brings unquestioned benefits" in terms of preferential tariffs and increased trade, it was noted, but there were many other advantages in terms of technical, educational, scientific assistance and in other areas "where years of enforced isolation from the world have left us lagging well behind other countries of comparable size and influence".

As long as the costs of membership do not substantially outweigh the benefits, South Africa will be better off as a member of the Commonwealth than as an "old boy" looking on from the sidelines.

The Eastern Province Herald gave a more wide-ranging editorial entitled "One good turn" which stated that "South Africa owes much to the Commonwealth, though leaving it was the decision of Dr Verwoerd's government".⁸ The Commonwealth had "kept up the psychological, diplomatic, economic and sporting pressure" on South Africa and "it is surely a mark of its effectiveness and of our new government's appreciation that we have rejoined the Club so quickly". But it also noted how much the Commonwealth had changed since 1961 and how it was no longer the "British Commonwealth". Queen Elizabeth had even indicated at the Cyprus conference in 1993 that she would step down as head of the Commonwealth if the others wanted her to. This was "likely to be some time in coming" but it indicated that the Commonwealth was now "an association of equal partners not a league under British leadership". South Africa's admittance might be the Commonwealth's "final achievement of major significance".

Far more enthusiastic about the return to the Club was the Durban newspaper, the Daily News, which, reflecting the fact that Natal had remained something of a "last outpost" during the apartheid years, welcomed South Africa's readmittance with a tinge of

⁸ Eastern Province Herald, 2 June 1994.

triumphalism.⁹

Thirty-three years ago yesterday, Dr Verwoerd took South Africa out of the Commonwealth and along a stony path. Today we return. It is an affirmation that apartheid, and the narrow, sectarian nationalism that went with it, have been expunged forever...Dr Verwoerd stalked out under the illusion that South Africa was a "white" nation which would not tolerate discussion of its internal affairs. We return as a rainbow nation with exactly the same spectrum of First and Third World, rich and poor, black and white that the Commonwealth itself has. The Commonwealth understands South Africa better than any other organisation could.

Noting the many, largely "informal", benefits that membership would bring, such as exchanges of information and expertise, it was stated that South Africans would once again "train at Sandhurst and Portsmouth" and there would be "policemen at Scotland Yard again". Young South Africans would be able to spend two-year working holidays in Britain. It concluded:

Only two member states have ever left the Commonwealth - Pakistan and South Africa. Pakistan returned years ago. We return today. The long night is over.

The visit of Queen Elizabeth to South Africa in March 1995 prompted further comments in the leading dailies on the Commonwealth connection and on the role of the monarchy as head of the Commonwealth. Again the response was muted in comparison with the explosion of royalist sentiment seen during the last visit of the royals in 1947. The Business Day noted that South Africa could prove to be a "lucrative asset to the Commonwealth" and that the queen's visit raised issues that were more than "symbolic".¹⁰ There was the symbolism of the recognition of

⁹ The Daily News, 1 June 1994.

¹⁰ Business Day, 17 March 1995.

Mandela as the world's "last hero" and the return of South Africa to the Commonwealth club. It was also noted that the monarchy had distanced itself from the efforts of the Thatcher government in Britain during the 1980's to "get closer" to South Africa's apartheid government. Furthermore, the Commonwealth had intervened actively through the Eminent Persons' Group in 1986 and had resorted to some punitive measures against South Africa. When negotiations began with the leading African nationalist organisations in 1990 the Commonwealth had been quick to support these negotiations.

The Star, for its part, wrote an editorial under the heading "Royal bonus" which stated that:

Surprisingly, the benefits of Queen Elizabeth's visit to South Africa are not difficult to quantify. While some may have questioned the value of the royal tour, there is no doubt that in the short time the Queen and Prince Philip were in the country they did a power of good, not only in lifting morale in disadvantaged areas but in stimulating business and political relationships between Britain and South Africa.¹¹

The tone of the editorial was warm and approving but somewhat detached and business-like. There was no suggestion of an appeal to loyalty on behalf of English speakers, a rallying around the crown as the symbol of the British connection as there would have been during the late forties and fifties as the republican debate raged in South Africa between the Afrikaans and English-speaking population. Instead, there was an emphasis on what the royal influence could do for the "reconstruction" of the country after the "damage" caused by "years of isolation".

The Queen, well informed about South Africa, has spoken to economists, educationists, industrialists and businessmen here and has seen a great deal. She has indicated that Britain wants to help with the

¹¹ The Star, 27 March 1995.

reconstruction work. We could not ask for a better, or more influential, friend. We hope she returns soon.

What this example of mutedly pro-royal sentiment indicated was how much the political and social structure of the country had changed in the previous three decades. The battles that had raged between the white communities over the symbols of the British connection had been almost (but not entirely) superseded by the overwhelming issue of racial conflict and its consequences for the country in terms of economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, the need for reconciliation and reconstruction. An English-speaking academic at the country's biggest university commented that while the queen's visit brought "a lump to the throat... A small one, but nevertheless a lump", it was not primarily because of the British connection.¹² It was rather the remembrance of things past and the realisation that, after the intervening forty years of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid, "my Englishness, whatever that is, is no longer under attack, at least not from the same quarter". While it was good to hear "God Save the Queen" again, as well as the "thundering resonance of 'Die Stem' being rendered in an 'English' cathedral", it was more the "African" nature of the service (in St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town) which had brought him pleasure.

Rather than a symbol of sectional ethnic white interests the queen was now seen as the representative of an important, but almost foreign power. This reflected the steady erosion of British-South African links since 1945 under the pressure of Nationalist policies, Britain's diminished post-war role in the world and South Africa's increased international isolation. While it was also recognised that the queen, personally, had some sympathy for those who had for so many years struggled against apartheid and that she had expressed the desire to welcome the country back into the Commonwealth family, she was inevitably identified first and foremost, by many in the black community especially, as queen of the United Kingdom. Her role as head of

¹² "A visit to bring a lump to the throat", by Prof. Ken Smith, The Star, 31 March 1995.

the Commonwealth was not widely commented upon or even known to many South Africans for whom the Commonwealth had been a distant concept during the years of apartheid. The attitude, for example, of one leading daily newspaper with a mainly African readership was almost dismissive:

The difference between this visit and what happened in 1947 is that there will be fewer people thronging the streets just to have a glimpse of the queen. The interest is similar to that evoked by popular soap opera series.

...Forty years ago there was a political edge in the black community about the British monarchy. This was sharpened by the opposition Afrikaners showed towards the visit and that it came shortly after World War II. The political interest today is based more on courtesy than a commitment to things royal and more particularly to things British.¹³

More hostile was the comment of the PAC, which represented the "Africanist" viewpoint in South Africa. It criticised the government for over-indulging the queen of England at the expense of other leaders from neighbouring countries. "Is it because she is white? Or is it because we are reaffirming that she is our colonial mother?"¹⁴ was the comment of an official statement put out by the party soon after the queen had departed.

Afrikaner attitudes had, on the other hand, undergone something of a sea-change and the old hostility to the symbols of the British connection, including the monarchy and the Commonwealth itself, had, largely, but not entirely disappeared. There were a few demonstrations by right-wing fringe Afrikaner groups during the queen's visit, one of which demanded an official apology and reparations from her for the Anglo-Boer War. But there was no talk by the National Party or even the Conservative Party of a

¹³ Sowetan, 22 March 1995.

¹⁴ Quoted in The Star, 3 April 1995.

boycott of official functions which were held in her honour and F.W. de Klerk, one of the deputy presidents of the new government, attended the banquet on the royal yacht in Durban harbour on the last night of the tour.

In an article commemorating the bicentennial of British influence in South Africa (1795-1995), the historian, Hermann Giliomee, outlined the history of British colonial rule in South Africa since 1795 and noted the contribution to liberal thought and economic development that the British had brought with them (as well as the seeds of racial segregation and apartheid).¹⁵ He noted that English speakers felt they had been long been simply "spectators" ("blote toeskouers") or onlookers of the power struggle between Afrikaner and black nationalism. However, he estimated that some "seventy per cent" of them must have voted for the National Party in the first all-race elections of 1994, although "not with enthusiasm" because there were so few English-speaking representatives in that party. English speakers thought of themselves in individual terms, not "group" terms and they were individuals "in a land where politics is driven and bedevilled by groups" ("op groepsbasis bedryf en besleg word"). The "bitter satisfaction" that the English speakers could enjoy, however, was that politicians could not pass any budget without the taxes that English South African companies had provided.

The return to the Commonwealth was reported extensively in the leading Afrikaans newspapers such as Beeld, Rapport, and Die Burger. While the commentary was not enthusiastic and tended to give factual reports of the advantages of membership as quoted by others, there were also signs that the return has been greeted without any emotional hostility or sense of resentment.

The largest Afrikaans daily, Beeld, ran a number of articles on the return to the Commonwealth, and greeted the event on 2 June 1994 with the words, "Geagte lid" ("Dear Member"). It was placed, undramatically, in the context of South Africa's return to

¹⁵ H. Giliomee, "Die Engelsman se SA tuiste", Insig (Cape Town, Nasionale Tydskrifte), September 1995, pp.16-18.

respectability and her admittance to other organisations such as the Non-aligned Movement and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).¹⁶ It also noted the benefits that the Commonwealth would provide in terms of technical advice, financial co-operation and economic development. It concluded by quoting the high commissioner in London, Kent Durr, who had said "We have truly nothing to lose and can only win".

In a separate article of the same day Beeld noted that South Africa had now returned to the "deep-rooted British past of a certain large section of her population" ("die diepwortelde Britse verlede van 'n sekere groot deel van sy bevolking"). It noted that all Commonwealth countries had been part of the British Empire and the British monarch was still the symbolic head of the Commonwealth. In fifteen of them the British monarch was represented by a governor-general (Antigua, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Granada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New-Guinea, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadine, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu, a special member). It claimed the Commonwealth was "administered" by a secretariat based in London and said that the member countries had regular meetings of heads of government and ministers of finance in order to "co-ordinate policy directions" ("om beleidsrigtings te koördineer"). They consulted each other on economic, scientific, educational, financial, legal and military matters.

An article in Beeld of 1 June 1994, the day South Africa officially rejoined the Commonwealth, summarised the history of South Africa House, the headquarters of the South African embassy, now high commission, in London. It referred to the building as South Africa's "outpost" in the international arena from the imperial hey-day of the 1930's to the present, noting the "Euro-centric" nature of much of the decorations, paintings and other symbols of the white-ruled past. It concluded by saying that for years the National Party government tried to get the post of high commissioner raised to the status of "ambassador". Now, with the return to the Commonwealth, it was asked whether

¹⁶ Beeld, 2 June 1994.

the title would go back to "high commissioner" and whether it would be mean a "lowering of status".

Die Burger reported on 2 June the easier admission to Britain for young people that the Commonwealth membership had now made possible. It also reported that South African ambassadors in Commonwealth countries would now be known as high commissioners and that John Major, the British prime minister, had wished Mandela well on the occasion of South Africa's readmission, with the words: "For all of us in the Commonwealth this significant moment symbolises the interests which we share and the opportunities that lie ahead to further those interests together".¹⁷

The biggest Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, Rapport, commented in somewhat less enthusiastic terms, on the Commonwealth concession to young South African citizens between the ages of 17 and 27 who could now work for two years in Britain. Those of any age with grandparents born in Britain could live and work there for up to four years. But this was seen as a disadvantage because "businessmen" felt that many of the best-trained and most promising young people "could be lost" to South Africa if they felt tempted to use this opportunity to stay overseas.¹⁸ Rapport also noted that South Africa would have to contribute an amount worth up to 4% of the Commonwealth secretariat budget and would be expected to make "voluntary contributions" ("'n soortgelyke vrywillige bydrae") to the technical fund, the youth program, etc.

On the other hand the public relations officer for the armaments producer, "Denel", was quoted in the same article as welcoming Commonwealth membership because of the doors that were now opened to South Africa's arms exports in Commonwealth countries. Similarly quoted was the comment of the Standard Bank economist, Andre' Hammersma, who said: "One must take a much broader view of

¹⁷ Die Burger, 2 June 1994.

¹⁸ Rapport, 5 June 1994.

the international community and get away from the inward-thinking ("inwaartse denke") that was a hall-mark of the previous government. If we can be seen as a strong and active member of the Commonwealth we could heighten our presence in international markets, which would be to our advantage". He saw the rejoining of the Commonwealth as "largely symbolic" but also "extremely important".

South Africa, on 1 June 1994, returned to a Commonwealth that was continually changing and evolving as an institution and that bore little resemblance to that which she had left in 1961. This was inevitable in an institution that lacked a constitution and that was based on voluntary co-operation between nations in so many areas.

Some regarded this informality as a source of strength, others as a source of weakness. What is clear, however, is that its flexibility kept it alive during periods of great strain and in circumstances where dissolution seemed imminent. Much of the organisation's international prestige and influence was owed to this ability to weather the many crises that beset the group in the sixties and seventies, not the least of which were the Rhodesian and South African problems, and, by implication, the British response to those problems. Throughout this period British influence and control over the organisation declined steadily, often by choice rather than necessity. British disenchantment with the Commonwealth is a theme in itself and it had many and varied causes, not the least of which were the criticisms by the Afro-Asians of the way Britain handled the Rhodesian crisis and the apartheid problem.

During the two decades since 1961 Britain and the Commonwealth have faced five major crises concerning southern Africa. Each of them involved "not only bilateral relations between Britain and southern African countries, but Britain's place and role

within the multilateral Commonwealth".¹⁹ Each crisis came to a head at a heads of government meeting. In 1961 at the London summit, South Africa withdrew. In 1966, in an extraordinary summit in Lagos, British policy towards Rhodesia's UDI came under scrutiny and in 1971, at the Singapore summit, intense pressure was placed on Britain to try and dissuade her from resuming arms sales to South Africa. In 1979, at the Lusaka summit, skilful lobbying persuaded the British government to attempt an all-party constitutional settlement of the Rhodesian problem. In 1985, at the summit in Nassau, and later in 1986 at the mini-summit in London, Britain and the Commonwealth were at odds over the issue of sanctions against South Africa. The same issue continued to dominate the conferences in Vancouver in 1987 and at Kuala Lumpur in 1989, the last of the summits before the release of Nelson Mandela and the beginning of negotiations in South Africa.

Stephen Chan has pointed out that successive British governments lacked the ability to formulate independent foreign policies towards southern Africa because of the very nature of the decolonization strategy adopted by Britain in Africa.²⁰ Instead of crafting and manipulating the political relations before and after independence in order to maintain the maximum influence over her former colonies (as France had successfully done), Britain "conceived of the Commonwealth as providing desirable links after independence". Conditions had been attached to membership of the Commonwealth, one of which was that South Africa should not be a member, nor, for that matter, should any other state deliberately pursuing a "racialist policy", (as Nyerere had said in 1961). This meant constraints on Britain's bilateral dealings with the rebel Rhodesian government, first, and then with the Republic of South Africa. To the other members of the Commonwealth, both issues were intertwined and involved one central problem, racism.

¹⁹ Stephen Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organization. Constitutionalism, Britain and South Africa", Round Table, No.312, 1989, p.394.

²⁰ Ibid.

Britain wanted to preserve an area of independent action concerning what she perceived to be Western and strategic interests in the area that were separate from purely Commonwealth interests. In the Commonwealth context this proved difficult to achieve and because Britain took so long to solve the Rhodesian problem she was identified by the Commonwealth as the "central actor" in all southern African questions.²¹ This explained the bitterness with which Edward Heath's attempts to resume arms sales to South Africa was greeted in 1971. Arnold Smith, the secretary-general of the Commonwealth from 1965-75, described the effect of this particular crisis on the Commonwealth:

I have no doubt that, if Heath had gone ahead with large sales of arms to South Africa, he would have done even more damage to Britain's standing and influence in the world than Anthony Eden did through the invasion of Suez in 1956. He was saved from this because the Commonwealth had matured into a representative association whose leaders acted quickly, spoke frankly and finally produced a pair of agreements that saved everybody's political face.²²

The Commonwealth had gone "to the brink of disintegration" but "happily" no country left it and the incident had shown the value of candid consultation among Commonwealth leaders to head off a crisis and "to save a state from making an appalling blunder".

During the 1980's the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher successfully defended the proposition that South Africa was important to the West as a bastion of anti-Soviet expansionism and refused to contemplate economic sanctions despite the opposition of almost the entire Commonwealth to her approach. British foreign policy towards South Africa in those years was described by G. Berridge as having two major planks: "a

²¹ Ibid., p.395.

²² Arnold Smith and Clyde Sanger, Stitches in Time. The Commonwealth in World Politics (Andre Deutsch, London, 1981) p.205.

paranoid fear of Soviet expansionism, and...a desire to strengthen Britain's share of the South African market".²³ The Thatcher government, which, he claims, regarded the second of these as the most important, had an approach based on the forecast that South Africa's apartheid regime would last for some time to come and that therefore Britain would have to continue to deal with it in the foreseeable future. American policy at the time (under the Reagan and Bush administrations) was similar and based on the principle of "Constructive Engagement", first enunciated by Nixon in the 1970's. Thus it was that the British government felt able to continue with a policy rejected by most of its Commonwealth partners.

As Chan points out, the Commonwealth of the early 1960's was very different to the Commonwealth of the 1980's.²⁴ It had lost its British-centric approach to world and Commonwealth affairs, largely as a result of Afro-Asian anger with the way Britain had handled issues such as Rhodesia, apartheid and the need for a principled stand on racism. It was at the 1964 conference that Nkrumah of Ghana, suspecting British lack of resolve over Rhodesia, had proposed the establishment of a Commonwealth secretariat. It would be a counter-weight to what was increasingly being seen as British manipulation of the organisation through the Commonwealth relations office in Whitehall. The idea received strong support from African countries in particular and, at a special conference in 1965, the secretariat came into being. As Miller put it, the secretariat had stepped into a situation (the Commonwealth crisis over Rhodesia) in time "to catch... from failing hands the torch of Commonwealth".²⁵

It turned out, however, to be a watered down version of what had been originally proposed and which Canada had wanted - a body

²³ Quoted in Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organization", p.396.

²⁴ Ibid., p.397.

²⁵ Miller, Survey, p.415.

headed by a secretary-general with strong executive powers. British and Australian opposition to the idea of the Commonwealth behaving like the United Nations meant that the informal and intimate nature of the organisation would continue to be expressed through the secretariat and that it would not arrogate to itself executive functions.²⁶ The secretary-general would have the status of a high commissioner and would have access to heads of state but would not be an "executive actor on the international stage". He would, instead, help maintain the "unwritten conventions" which had always determined the processes of Commonwealth consultation. There were, however, provisions in the Agreed Memorandum for adaptation of procedures to meet changing circumstances.²⁷ A Canadian career diplomat, Arnold Smith, was chosen as the first secretary-general and under his direction the new body developed a widely-respected role as an important facilitator of Commonwealth affairs.²⁸

For the first time a non-British body, the secretariat, took on the task of organizing a Commonwealth conference, that of Lagos (which was also the first heads of government meeting outside of Britain) in 1965. The Lagos conference resulted in Britain admitting that there was Commonwealth interest in how it conducted its bilateral relations with Rhodesia (although it was also accepted that Rhodesia was primarily a British responsibility). Thereafter, the Rhodesian issue held equal attention with matters such as arms sales to South Africa and, with the broader question of apartheid. Increasingly, however, the concern with economic issues and Third World development began to predominate in the dealings of the secretariat. Under the second secretary-general, Shridath Ramphal, who was elected in 1975 this aspect of economic internationalism was

²⁶ Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organization", p.398.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Miller, Survey, p.416.

reinforced.²⁹ Ramphal had been heavily involved in the Lome negotiations for Commonwealth access to the EEC once Britain had terminated Commonwealth preferences, wound up the sterling area and had entered the European Economic Community.

Chan notes that under Shridath Ramphal the Commonwealth developed into more and more of an international organisation with an advancing "constitutionalism" which was almost directly at odds with the Agreed Memorandum of 1965.³⁰ Much of this was a response to Rhodesia and South Africa in the form of declarations of principles adopted at various heads of government summits since the Singapore conference in 1971. The Singapore Declaration had been adopted during Arnold Smith's term of office at the end of a stormy summit in which Britain's Conservative government was taken to task for its intent to resume arms sales to South Africa. It described racial prejudice as a "dangerous sickness" and included six basic principles identifying a Commonwealth view of international relations. It was elaborated upon in 1977 in London as a response to the New Zealand government's intention to resume sporting relations with South Africa and gave rise to the Gleneagles Agreement, or the Commonwealth Statement on Apartheid in Sport.

Chan surmises that sometime between 1977 and 1979, Shridath Ramphal must have "become aware of the constitutional possibilities in the summit Declaration format".³¹ A crucial meeting at Lusaka in 1979, in which successful pressure was applied on Thatcher's government to allow moves towards majority rule in Zimbabwe, produced the Lusaka Declaration of the Commonwealth on Racism and Racial Prejudice and referred, incidentally, to the Commonwealth as an "international organisation". ("The days of an informal and unstructured

²⁹ Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organization", p.399.

³⁰ Ibid., pp.399-403.

³¹ Ibid., p.401.

association were fading")³². Other declarations that followed included the Melbourne Declaration on improving international economic conditions (1981), the Goa Declaration on Security of 1983 (prompted by the US invasion of a Commonwealth country, Grenada) and followed up by the Nassau Declaration on World Order (1985).

Also adopted at Nassau was the highly significant Commonwealth Accord on Southern Africa which established the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) and a package of delayed economic and diplomatic sanctions which awaited the EPG report. Generality had begun to be replaced by "point-by-point" programmes of action.³³ This was to cause severe difficulties with certain members, notably Britain, which had rebuked Ramphal for allowing the Commonwealth to become what "was never envisaged...an instrument for joint executive action".³⁴ As Austin puts it, there was now a "complete reversal of roles" as London tried to stop "Commonwealth policies" from emerging.

To Austin, it seemed that the days of collective action were dead and that by 1987 Commonwealth governments had begun to draw back from confrontation over South Africa.³⁵ On other wider issues, however, such as the Nassau Declaration on World Order, Chan notes that the growing Commonwealth "Charter" had begun to indicate "both a more formalized organization, and one with a more formalized world view which required united action".³⁶ The constraints of the 1965 Agreed Memorandum, he says, and its view of the Commonwealth as an informal grouping, had been modified "if not greatly and radically altered".

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Dennis Austin, "The Commonwealth and Britain", Chatham House Papers, No.41, Royal Institute of International Affairs (Routledge, London, 1988), p.14.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organisation", p.402.

Chan goes on to analyse the Commonwealth sanctions campaign against South Africa and to assess its significance for the future of the Commonwealth. He notes that the polite differences over the efficacy of sanctions expressed in the 1964 communique, before the secretariat had even been set up, had by 1985 grown into a major conflict between Thatcher's government and the rest. It resulted in an end to the Commonwealth's ability to achieve a rough consensus on southern African issues and thus considerably reduced the international impression of the effectiveness of the Commonwealth's interventions. Ramphal had tried to introduce a strategy for the Nassau meeting which would be seen as a compromise initiated by the Secretariat. But it had been disregarded by Thatcher, despite initial indications of a division in her own cabinet concerning the need to stay in step with the Commonwealth.³⁷

Thatcher's main motivation at Nassau and again at the London mini-summit which followed in 1986, had been to preserve a "Western" as opposed to Commonwealth interest for Britain in the South African dispute, and one which was in step with Ronald Reagan's strategy of Constructive Engagement. It meant preventing the Commonwealth drive for sanctions and pressing her European partners to adopt the minimum degree of sanctions as a precedent which would allow Reagan to follow a similar course. It largely succeeded, though at the cost of Commonwealth consensus. After 1986 a type of "binary Commonwealth" emerged with Britain going one way and the rest another, with the communiqués reflecting this state of affairs.³⁸ At the London summit a "high-point of Commonwealth unanimity" was reached in terms of global issues but it was at precisely the same summit that "the Commonwealth saw slip from its grasp the British support, involvement or tolerance in its high-point of development". This, says Chan, was a watershed in Commonwealth growth and change.

In 1993 one British newspaper, The Independent on Sunday,

³⁷ Ibid., p.405.

³⁸ Ibid., p.408.

pointedly commented on the British attitude to the modern Commonwealth under the heading, "Goodbye to the Club". It noted how the British government's deliberate neglect of the Commonwealth had led to the virtual closure of the Commonwealth Institute in London, the end to preferential Commonwealth immigration from New Zealand, Australia and Canada and other measures which had "left little" for the old Commonwealth partners in terms of benefits of membership.³⁹ "Death by a thousand cuts" was how one Commonwealth diplomat had described Whitehall's deliberate "undermining" of the Commonwealth. The organisation was hardly referred to publicly in any of the bulletins and statements of the ministry of foreign and Commonwealth affairs, except in terms of "platitudes".

Thatcher's rationalisation for her government's stance on South Africa had been that sanctions would heighten the chances of violence in South Africa and would harm the black majority more than the whites.⁴⁰ The Eminent Persons' Group, on the other hand, had stressed the bloodshed that would result if change was postponed and added that it was not sanctions that would destroy the country but the persistence of apartheid and the government's failure to reform. "Sanctions and peace for South Africa have now become one and the same", they argued.⁴¹ The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in London held the same view as did the Labour Party opposition and the ANC alliance in exile. At a Canadian conference of anti-apartheid organisations meeting at the time of the Vancouver Commonwealth conference, an ANC spokesman said that mandatory economic sanctions remained the only way by which the international community could bring about the dismantling of apartheid.⁴²

³⁹ Independent on Sunday, 26 September 1993.

⁴⁰ Interview with the Guardian, 9 July 1986.

⁴¹ The Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons Mission to South Africa. The Commonwealth Report (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1986, p.14.

⁴² Reported in the Financial Times (London), 13 October 1987.

But by that time (1987) the failure to persuade Britain had made the Commonwealth resigned to the fact that comprehensive sanctions were impossible without major British and American support. There were also doubts being expressed as to the effect of such sanctions on the Front Line states and of South African threats to them and their economies if such sanctions were to be attempted. Nevertheless, at the Commonwealth conference in Vancouver in 1987 it was decided to downgrade the option of giving the Front Line states support and instead to pursue the sanctions issue as a matter of principle.⁴³ Thatcher was aware of the "element of bluff" in all this and she knew that, as the precedent of 1986 showed, the Commonwealth would in any case allow exceptions to the consensus. She did not moderate her opposition to sanctions then or again at the 1989 Kuala Lumpur conference, when the release of some ANC and other banned persons in South Africa was being mooted and which she pointed to as justification for her anti-sanctions stance.⁴⁴

The local and international context for South Africa's return to the Commonwealth in 1994 was provided by the end of the Cold war, on the one hand, and by the end of apartheid, on the other. Under increasing international pressure in the 1980's as a result of the application of limited but effective financial and investment sanctions (applied despite the reluctance of her key trading partners), South Africa's siege economy came under increasing stress. At the same time, large-scale and almost continuous internal unrest made the military interventions outside the country, in Angola particularly, difficult to maintain.⁴⁵ It was the ending of Soviet support for Angola and the general "thaw" in international relations during the Gorbachev era that provided the final incentive for the Nationalist government, once the relatively hard-line president, P.W. Botha, had been removed from

⁴³ Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organization", p.408.

⁴⁴ Reported in the Sowetan, 25 October 1989.

⁴⁵ C. Saunders, "War in Southern Angola, 1987-88, and Namibian Decolonisation", Paper read at the SA Historical Society Conference, UNISA, January 1991.

power, to move towards a negotiated settlement of the apartheid problem. This then provided one of the necessary conditions for the return of the republic to the Commonwealth.

Soon after the 1989 conference South Africa's new president, F.W. de Klerk, moved towards acceptance of a negotiated future for the country. In parliament in 1990 he announced the unbanning of the main African nationalist organisations and the release of Nelson Mandela. Two years prior to this the first steps had been taken towards the independence of Namibia. In the wake of Russian "Glasnost and Perestroika" the world and South Africa were moving into a post-Cold War thaw of co-operation and demilitarisation. The Commonwealth had suddenly lost one of its main sources of tension and conflict (some even claimed, its "raison d'etre"). The 1991 conference in Harare found itself preoccupied with the need for a new focus and the apartheid item was placed at No.37 on the agenda, "hardly a priority rating", as one South African newspaper commented.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the sanctions debate had not entirely disappeared and the old divisions remained but without the combative presence of Margaret Thatcher to inflame the other members.

President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe argued at the Harare conference for a continuation of Commonwealth sanctions until irreversible signs of change in South Africa were evident. He was supported by the new secretary-general, Chief Ameka Anyaouka, who argued that the "step-by-step" approach to sanctions should be maintained. Nelson Mandela requested a similar Commonwealth stance during his visit to Harare at that same time. Britain, under the new Conservative prime minister, John Major, who had replaced Thatcher the previous year in something of a "palace coup", adopted a softer approach to the issue than before but argued that all sanctions except those relating to arms supplies should be lifted in order to reward De Klerk for his reforms.

An independent Namibia had become the organisation's fiftieth member in 1990 and it was confidently predicted that South Africa

⁴⁶ The Star, 7 October 1991.

would reapply as soon as a majority government was in place. A well-known Commonwealth correspondent and commentator, Derek Ingram, argued for a new declaration of human rights for the Commonwealth in the aftermath of the defeat of apartheid, one that encompassed democracy and the right to basic freedom from oppression.⁴⁷

At the October 1993 heads of government meeting in Cyprus the Commonwealth prepared itself for the imminent return of South Africa to the Club. By then the date had been set for the first multi-party elections and despite setbacks such as the "Bisho Massacre", and later, the assassination of the Umkhonto we Sizwe leader, Chris Hani, and despite signs of security force collusion with an anti-ANC campaign inside the country, it seemed that there was no turning back on the road to majority rule. Commonwealth sanctions against South Africa had been dropped one month prior to the Cyprus summit and the consensus of opinion (excluding Britain) was that sanctions had been vindicated as a means of putting pressure on South Africa to change.⁴⁸ Increased Commonwealth assistance to South Africa was promised during the election period and the ANC executive spokesman on foreign affairs, Thabo Mbeki, announced on 23 October that the ANC would take South Africa back to the Commonwealth.⁴⁹ He said it would be important "symbolically" as the Commonwealth was the first major international organisation to exclude South Africa as a result of internal policy. There would be "much to gain" for South Africa in terms of financial resources and interaction with other countries.

In 1995, the year after South Africa's readmission, it was recognised that South Africa's return to the Commonwealth could "restore and cement" the organisation and its principles.⁵⁰ Mandela could use the Commonwealth forum to pursue the idea of

⁴⁷ Reported in The Star, 13 June 1991.

⁴⁸ The Star, 24 October 1993.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Business Day, 17 March 1995.

North/South dialogue between rich and poor nations. He could "champion" the aim of better access for poorer nations to the markets of the First World. He could point to South Africa as an "example of political tolerance and democracy", of conflict resolution and peacemaking. South Africa could help in the search of the Commonwealth for a new set of "post-Cold War" values and could offer assistance in co-operative financial and trading relations, economic development and educational advancement. He could also press for "expanding membership" of the club and could "boost the Commonwealth's standing" in the world. The Commonwealth in return could help to keep the "fragile National Party/ANC coalition in government intact. The ministerial meetings on finance and trade could offer much assistance to South Africa.

It was also recognised, however, that there were obvious limits to the usefulness of the organisation for South Africa. The split between First World and Third World countries made it difficult to achieve consensus. There was no guarantee from the Commonwealth or any other organisation for the success of a new South Africa. Even the negotiations for South Africa to join the Lome Convention, which had covered most of the "developing" Commonwealth countries in their access to the lucrative European market, had no guarantee of success.⁵¹

The thirty years since 1961 had seen a progressive expansion of the Commonwealth in terms of member countries, accompanied by a proportionate loss of cohesiveness and effectiveness on the world stage. Although it is true to say that the Commonwealth was never meant to act "as one" in international affairs and that since its earliest days there had been differences between its members on international and internal policies, it is also possible to argue that up until the mid-1950's there was enough of a consensus between its members to maintain something of a united front vis-a-vis the rest of the world. The Suez crisis shattered that fragile consensus and the years that followed demonstrated

⁵¹ J. Stewart, "Stay Loose: South Africa Should Forget about Joining a Trading Bloc", Finance Week, 6 February 1994, pp.23-24.

increasing fractiousness and internal dissension, a large proportion of which was related to the racial problem in southern Africa. Underlying this was the problem of a loss of influence from the centre, a withdrawal of British responsibility, interest and support for the Commonwealth ideal in the post-Suez and post-Rhodesian eras.

Nevertheless, the Commonwealth had been rescued from potential collapse in the 1960's by the combined efforts of individuals and countries (such as Canada, which had a strong interest in the continuation of the organisation), and it went on to develop a new consensus based on antagonism to apartheid and racial discrimination as well as a commitment to a fairer distribution of economic wealth in the world as a whole. The virtual complete isolation of Britain in the Commonwealth during the disputes over sanctions against South Africa in the 1980's marked a watershed in the attempts to develop a new "constitutionalism" for the organisation. But the end of apartheid and the return of South Africa under the new ANC-led government of Nelson Mandela in 1994 helped the Commonwealth towards a redefinition of its role in the post-Cold War era, a role which was being increasingly defined as that of a consensus on the need to support world-wide efforts for economic justice and for the promotion of democratic forms of government.

But for South Africa the return to the Commonwealth fold marked, more than anything else, the end of isolation and the rejoining of a "family" of friends whose moral and sometimes material support had been of incalculable value during the long years of apartheid.

Perhaps the most important aspect for South Africa of Commonwealth membership in the future is expressed in the words of Chief Ameka Anyaouka in 1993:

I believe the Commonwealth is in a position because of its unique attributes to help a very pluralistic South Africa to come to terms with democracy and stability. So the help the Commonwealth will give to South Africa

will not just end with the liquidation of apartheid. I foresee the help from the Commonwealth continuing to South Africa after apartheid is ended.⁵²

In 1989 Chan wrote that much of the future of the Commonwealth would depend on its secretaries-general, since they were the organisation's major resource.⁵³ In the aftermath of Shridath Ramphal's forceful and sometimes stormy career and in the light of with the more prosaic post-Cold War and post-apartheid period in which the Commonwealth is operating in the 1990's this seems less important as a guide to the Commonwealth's future. The extent to which Britain continues to down-play the organisation's value is a more important factor because of the still enormous diplomatic and psychological influence that Britain, as the "mother" country, exerts. It is possible that the predicted change to a Labour government in Britain in 1997 will mark a revival in the prestige and effectiveness of the Commonwealth as significant as that produced by the accession of South Africa to its ranks in 1994. On the other hand, the Labour Party had, by 1987, abandoned its opposition to continued British integration into the European Community and thus, by implication, the Commonwealth as the alternative arena for the projection of British power and influence in the world. A Labour government may also, therefore, allow British indifference to continue.

Britain had become very much "one among equals" in terms of Commonwealth leadership by the 1990's and so the question now is whether the many and varied multilateral links that had been forged between all the members will be strong enough to maintain the fabric of Commonwealth well into the next century. The fissiparous and centrifugal pressures remain despite what Chan has noted as a growth in the organisation's constitutionalism and formalism in recent years. It may, in fact require a return to

⁵² Quoted in Peter Vale, "Points of Re-entry - Prospects for a Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy", South Africa International, Vol.21, No.4, 1991, p.227.

⁵³ Chan, "The Commonwealth as an International Organization", p.409.

the more informal and flexible procedures of earlier years to promote the long-term growth and effectiveness of the Commonwealth in the context of an unpredictable post-Cold War future.

Perhaps the last word on the significance of South Africa's rejoining the Commonwealth in June 1994 and the symbolism provided by the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of British influence in South Africa in 1995 should be left to one of the foremost interpreters of English South African literary culture, Professor Guy Butler. In an article entitled "Home is where the heart is", written for the Afrikaans literary and cultural journal, Insig ("Insight"), on the occasion of the bicentennial of the British occupation of the Cape in 1795, Butler assessed the legacy of two centuries of British contact with South Africa and called it, "a puzzling and sobering exercise".⁵⁴

He noted that in a world community of over 300 million who spoke English as their home language, in South Africa only a "trifling" 3.5 million out of 39 million were mother-tongue speakers of the language. These had inherited the "resentment", sometimes the "hatred" of all the other groups in the country, "the Boers and the Blacks for outright imperial conquest and/or dispossession, and the Indians for different reasons". But English was the most "needed" language in the new nation although it was the most "resented" as well. English speakers had never developed "a strong collective sense" and although for much of this period they had identified with their country of origin, now they felt more at home in South Africa "than anywhere else".

Furthermore, the Empire had become "Commonwealth" and

sufficient goodwill and practical benefit had been created by Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to ensure that almost all the ex-

⁵⁴ Guy Butler, "Home is Where the Heart is", Insig, September 1995, pp.12-13.

colonies, on achieving independence, opted to stay in the Commonwealth. We, the one exception, have now returned to the Club.

The Commonwealth was "kept going" by virtue of an "archaic, almost totally a-political institution, the Monarchy" - an "ongoing symbol of community not immediately subject to the will of the people". This was an "asset" which no popularly elected leader could match. He or she was there "by blood or birth, which are archetypal, deeper than the ballot box". The continued mystique of the monarchy in South Africa and elsewhere, he concludes, was a result, perhaps, of the fact that "all being children of God, we are born with a sympathy for royalty".

Whether an increasingly anti-monarchical Britain, Australia and Canada would agree with this assertion, however, is a moot point. But even if the British monarchy, as a symbol of the unity of the Commonwealth, continues for the foreseeable future to provide one of the most important bonds holding its members together, it is the many and varied connections of a social, political, economic and linguistic nature that will provide the essential fabric of the Commonwealth's continued existence.

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I. Letters to the Author

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